

{ parent-theses }

a quarterly journal for parents produced by John Allison

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Editorial ~ Rhythm and Routine

Whenever I consider the significance of rhythm in my life I find myself thinking about breathing, and the pulsing of my blood. About day and night. The movement of seasons. The phases of the moon. Ebb and flow of the tides, the booming of waves on the rocks below the beach-house where I lived for a while (and slept so deeply). Expansion and contraction. Openings and closures. Nodes and interstices. Out-reaching, in-gathering. Letting go and letting come. These constant movements, which are also shaping and forming... And immediately I notice we have a problem in contemporary life, which seems so arrhythmic. I see this is connected with stress.

The mystery of rhythm is its relationship with form. Rhythm gives shape even to time. We can't really talk about rhythm without recognising boundaries — rhythm measures the movement between boundaries, and also across boundaries. There is an inside and an outside — a kind of membrane that pulses with life. "Form is the envelope of pulsation" (a Tantric saying).

I note two effects of living in rhythm, in time-space. One is that I am less exhausted. The other is that the moods of my soul are given shape and definition. Boundaries. When I consider this more deeply, I am convinced that rhythm facilitates a spacious relationship to experiences, and then other things may enter and 'speak'.

All gratification in life is founded on the regular reappearance of external things. The alternation of day and night, of the seasons, of flower and fruit, and everything else that confronts us at regular intervals so that we may, and should, enjoy it: these are the very springs of our daily life. The more openly we avow these pleasures, the happier we are. But if these phenomena revolve severally before us and we take no part in them, proving unreceptive to these precious gifts — then the greatest evil, the most dire sickness breaks out in us, and we look upon life as the most repulsive burden.

~ Wolfgang Johann von Goethe

Rhythm and routine then are sources of health — we rest in the familiar, the repetitive.

Yet routine tasks can seem a burden, especially when you feel tired (as most parents do). Where does our distaste, our hatred even, of mundane work come from? Was it when you were forced as a child to do chores? Were you made to work as punishment? Or was it because you were scolded for just not getting it right? Even though you were trying so hard to be helpful, was it because you were a 'nuisance'? Whatever happened to that little child in you who loved imitating Mummy and Daddy, enthusiastically doing what they did? Somehow, work became a chore rather than a joy. And now, how can you find your way back into the Kingdom of Good Works? Recognising that rhythm and routine is good for you may not be sufficient motivation — what can rekindle that joy, that willingness? It could be a realisation such as the one expressed in this poem:

Zen of Housework

I look over my own shoulder
down my arms
to where they disappear under water
into hands inside pink rubber gloves
moiling among dinner dishes.

My hands lift a wine glass,
holding it by the stem and under the bowl.
It breaks the surface
like a chalice
rising from a medieval lake.

Full of the grey wine
of domesticity, the glass floats
to the level of my eyes.
Behind it, through the window
above the sink, the sun, among
a ceremony of sparrows and bare branches
is setting in Western America.

I can see thousands of droplets
of steam — each a tiny spectrum — rising
from my goblet of grey wine.
They sway, changing directions
constantly — like a school of playful of fish,
or like the sheer curtain
on the window of another world.

Ah, the grey sacrament of the mundane!

I am deeply grateful to Al Zolnyas for this poem, to Gabriele Schwibach for her lovely painting 'Winter Tree Stary Night', and to the other notable contributors to this issue: Stephanie Dowrick, Cynthia Aldinger, and Lou Harvey-Zahra. And to you, dear readers...

The Bliss of a Routine Life

[Stephanie Dowrick is well-known for her "Inner Life" column in the Good Weekend Magazine (Sydney Morning Herald and The Age) where the following article appeared on 20 March this year. It is reprinted here with her kind permission.]

Predictable schedules and clear boundaries are as good for Mum and Dad as they are for the kids.

Most parents think of the births of their children as high points in their lives. But most will also say that turning themselves into relaxed, confident parents remains one of their greatest challenges.

Where I live, the number of little children has grown rapidly in recent years. Because I've loved being a mother myself, I find this delightful. Yet as I watch newish parents, and listen to those I know personally. I see that a couple of critical parenting cornerstones are becoming harder to apply. I don't think that this is because they are any less useful, but rather that they are somewhat out of step with how parents increasingly think of themselves in non-parenting roles.

The first of these is establishing simple, predictable routines. By this I don't mean that tiny babies should be pushed into a rigid schedule of feeding and sleep. In fact, I think that's wrong and often damaging. But by the time the child emerges from the cocoon of infancy into toddlerhood and beyond, it is incredibly helpful to parents, and soothing and stabilising for the child, to have predictable rhythms to most days' events.

This might at first seem too hard for busy parents to achieve. It doesn't fit easily with work schedules or with parents' increasing need for their children to be flexible. This is where it can seem that generational needs clash. Parents may want their children to stay up late some nights but not others, to snatch a rest in the car rather than in bed, and to eat meals late if that's when the adults are ready. They may also want their children to tolerate intense attention at some times and little or no attention at others, without offering the skills and means for independent play away from home. (A backpack with a changing range of toys geared towards imaginative play is a life saver often missing even in well-off families.)

It is understandable that parents should rate that kind of flexibility so highly. It's how we tend to live our adult lives, hurtling from one thing to another, multi-tasking madly and responding to what's most urgent rather than what is most important. But while some children will adapt to this, many can't. Tired, irritable or confused children leave even the most loving parents feeling edgy and helpless.

The younger the child, the more they need a soothing rhythm to their days and nights. And the greater the benefits will soon be for the whole family. This includes lots of time for explorative play and exercise, simple meals, eating dinner by 6pm, early story and bed, and a long night's sleep. Even teenagers will usually benefit from eating earlier

and sleeping longer. In fact, when a child is cranky, demanding or 'impossible' — whatever their age — it's those routines that need your thoughtful attention, however inconvenient it may seem at first.

This emphasis on routine meshes with the second of these parenting cornerstones, which is to avoid bombarding your children with options. Usually offered with the best intentions, choice almost always creates tension rather than independence. Cheerfully and confidently stating that it's time to get dressed, eat breakfast, have a walk, bath, dinner or a story, or go to bed is realistic. It is also reassuring. Children will still have countless opportunities to develop and express their opinions. But they will do so far less anxiously when they know that the essential boundaries of their lives are consistent and predictable — and guarded by those who love them best.

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[Born in New Zealand, Stephanie Dowrick lived in Britain for many years, where she was founder and first Managing Director of *The Women's Press*, and later Chairperson. She has lived with her family in Sydney since 1983. Stephanie is widely known as the author of a number of books in the areas of personal, social and ethical development. Among her best-selling titles are *Intimacy and Solitude*, *Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love*, *The Universal Heart* and *Choosing Happiness: Life & Soul Essentials*. Her latest book is *In the Company of Rilke*. An ordained interfaith minister, she is also a regular guest on radio and gives frequent talks, workshops and retreats nationally and internationally. You can read more of her insightful writing at www.stephaniedowrick.com.]

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Rhythms, Routines and the Living Arts

[I am deeply grateful to Cynthia Aldinger, Director of LifeWays North America, for permission to print this edited extract from her new book "Home Away from Home — LifeWays Care of Children and Families" written together with Mary O'Donnell, and due to be published in the middle of this year.]

*Wash on Monday
Iron on Tuesday
Mend on Wednesday
Churn on Thursday
Clean on Friday
Bake on Saturday
Rest on Sunday*

~ Old Nursery Rhyme

Those were the days, my friend. Or were they? This nursery rhyme heralds a time long past when what happened inside the household happened through the labour of human hands with minimal mechanical support. Most often it was the homemakers, that is, the mothers, daughters and grandmothers, who were in charge of these activities while the fathers, sons and grandfathers were out in the fields engaged in equally important work.

Daily and weekly routines were adhered to relatively strictly. Making the food and tending to material things required planning and gathering of the necessary tools or ingredients. There were no 24-hour convenience stores or even pre-plucked chickens! The daily routines supported the weekly rhythms, which gradually shifted according to seasonal restrictions or needs. Like a piece of classical music, the household worked best when everything was well orchestrated. Each person had a contribution to make, and as soon as children were capable, they participated. By evening time, a family meal, perhaps followed by a little music or reading and a good night's rest, were the natural finale to a full-on day of work and play.

According to Laura Ingalls Wilder's testaments to these bygone days, when children were not in school, they were helping with daily chores. When time allowed, they played with siblings or friends. Sometimes they played games to test their physical dexterity, but their 'make-believe' play centred around activities of everyday life. My mother, who grew up decades after the *Little House on the Prairie* days, still recalls playing 'house' by drawing a frame in the dirt with a stick. Lines were drawn to indicate the different rooms, and it was clearly understood what activities took place within each of those 'rooms'.

As an historical context, it is helpful and interesting to note from whence we have come in regards to homemaking and the roles that children played. However, rather than sometimes feeling nostalgia for what we perceive to have been simpler times, let us consider how daily life activities, particularly those associated with homemaking, prepare our children for modern, contemporary living and create a solid foundation for lifelong learning. Before getting specific, let's look more generally at how having rhythms and routines can create a framework for healthy brain development.

We know that a child's brain is not a blank slate when he or she is born — for example, repetitive sounds in the womb already establish recognition in the baby after birth. The baby will turn its head when it hears a voice that it regularly heard before birth. Synaptic connections in the brain already exist for recognising those sounds. Repetition is the major tool for teaching a child anything. Exposure to an experience may create a synaptic connection, but it is repetition that myelinates the neural pathways to that connection. Myelin is a dielectric (electrically insulating) material that forms a layer, the myelin sheath, around the axon of a neuron. Without this myelination, a synaptic connection will eventually diffuse and disappear altogether due to weakness created by a lack of continued exposure to the experience. If I only play a game one time or only fold laundry infrequently in the presence of a young child, the capacity to remember that is limited. Frequent exposure is what imprints the brain and creates learning.

When this relatively recent understanding of brain development burst onto the scene of child development, some people became excited and took it to mean that we should expose young children to a multitude of educational materials so their brains would be filled with the knowledge of abstract concepts connected to reading and math skills. Learning toys and videos for infants and toddlers were convincingly advertised as helpful tools for fast-tracking children, and numerous curricula were developed to teach very young children skills that had once been reserved for elementary school.

What was seemingly overlooked in this frenzy of 'edutainment' was the fundamental understanding of how young children thrive. Young children, we all know, are primarily sensory beings — they want to take in the world through bodily experience, not through abstract concepts. The baby wants to taste and touch every object, not just see it with his eyes. Their innate drive is to enter fully into whatever surrounds them and to have as many of their senses involved as possible.

Imagine the difference in being shown a one-dimensional card with a big red square on it to learn the concept 'red' as compared to sitting near an adult who is sorting napkins or towels by colour or putting a bunch of red apples into a bowl or slicing strawberries into a salad. These are all activities in which the child can participate, either actively or just by being in the presence of what is happening.

Consider the experience of putting ingredients into a bowl — adding two cups of this, a teaspoon of that, two-and-a-half tablespoons of something else, cracking and adding three eggs, mixing it all together, pouring it into a baking dish, putting it into the oven, waiting for a certain amount of time to pass on the timer, taking it out of the warm oven, and waiting for it to cool before slicing it into eight pieces, and finally eating it. There is the chance to feel, smell and taste the ingredients, hear the mixing sounds, experience the warmth of the oven, play in the water while cleaning up, sweep up whatever fell on the floor, smell the scent of what is baking, and finally taste the final product. Compare that to sorting a bunch of beans into piles with various place values and never even getting to cook and eat them. Either way, the child may learn some foundational maths concepts, but which one most appeals to the natural learning style of young children?

What is happening when a child accomplishes the skill of squeezing out just the right amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush, or pouring a cup of milk without spilling over the top, or going to the grocery store and helping to put groceries into the cart with self-control, learning that he cannot have every single thing he desires?

These multi-sensory experiences stand head and shoulders above activities geared purely to teach abstract concepts. Just as important as involving several senses is meeting the child's need to experience activities repeatedly and routinely. In this way not only are the brain connections myelinated, we also meet in a healthy way the developmental needs of the child to touch, taste, smell, see, listen, move, experience connection and feel a bond to an attentive adult doing meaningful activities.

According to an article on brain development by Rosenberg and Reibstein in a special edition of *Newsweek*, Spring/Summer 1997:

Short of being raised in isolation, a baby will encounter enough stimulation in most households to do the trick — anything from banging pots and pans together to speaking to a sibling. The key phrase here is 'properly stimulated', which is not the same as expensively stimulated or, the worse fate, overstimulated.

So, how can we relate this to the times in which we are living? With modern technology, we are not required to do the household labour we had to do in the past. We don't have to cook, so why would the baby even be playing with pots and pans?

Let's press *Pause* for a moment. We can head down the 'modern life is not good for children' route, or we can take the higher road of gratitude for what we have while considering what from earlier times is still valid for everyday life. *LifeWays* promotes an approach to life that embraces modern living while at the same time recognising the gifts that simplicity, regularity, predictability, and hands-on experiences provide.

With technology creating opportunities for adults to spend less time doing household chores and more time pursuing personal interests or longer work schedules, where does that leave young children, who learn primarily by imitation and sensory experience? Common play themes observed in early childhood programs include children pretending to be talking on cell phones or sitting at computers, along with imitating television or movie characters. Imitation of life activities such as cooking, baking, cleaning, repairing, building and making things, gardening, doing laundry, car repair, caring for animals, and such are diminishing.

We could decide that is okay. However, we could also ask ourselves if we want our children to grow up without a deep sense of sustainable living. It is one type of skill to know how to open a package and put in the microwave, and it is another capacity to know how to crack an egg into a pan or make a sandwich or chop vegetables. It is one type of skill to remember to put your dirty laundry into the laundry basket so that someone will take care of it and have it show up clean again one day. It is another capacity to learn how to sort clothes, load a washing machine and dryer, sort and fold again, and put away clean laundry. It is one type of skill to know where to throw away broken things. It is another to experience how some things can be repaired.

There is such value for children to follow any process from beginning to end. For example, if it is possible for them to gather ears of corn from a nearby field, shuck and dry it, put the kernels in a grain mill, work so hard to grind it, make it into cornbread, and savour the results, their relationship to that cornbread is entirely different from eating it ready-made from a package.

It also seems wise for our children to know how to navigate the world in which they live and to be prepared for living in a world in which electricity and other technology

sometimes fail. There are also qualitative differences in the physical gestures a child experiences when something has been lovingly tended or created by a caring adult and the gesture of pushing buttons and flipping switches to make life work.

Consider the exponential increase in childhood asthma and diabetes, social-emotional challenges, allergies, obesity, decreased attention span and behavioural issues that are showing up in children under the age of six now. It is essential not to simplistically state that these phenomena are singularly related to the change in lifestyle over the past several decades. We want to be respectful of the individual child and family dealing with such concerns, and we acknowledge that many factors can be at play in a particular situation. However, we do not want to stick our heads in the sand and think that we can continue blithely on without taking note of the fundamental needs of our young children.

I am not proposing that all fun ends as soon as you have children and only starts up again after they get through early childhood! This is why I encourage families and caregivers to create support communities. As adults, it is our prerogative to love the unpredictable, enjoy late-night celebrating or eating junk food, to watch movies or television or play video and computer games — or to prefer to read all day or spend endless hours talking on the phone or computer with friends. These are all choices that we as adults are free to make.

We need to understand, however, that these are things that are not suitable for young children. Because children are relatively malleable, they will make adjustments to accommodate whatever lifestyle surrounds them. But at what price when we consider the increase in illnesses mentioned above? Children tend to thrive in environments that are predictable with regular rhythms for eating and sleeping, playing inside and outside, and with routines that support their bodily habits like bathing, toothbrushing, preparing for bed, and so forth. Actually, we adults also tend to be healthier when our lives have strong rhythms, particularly around food and sleep.

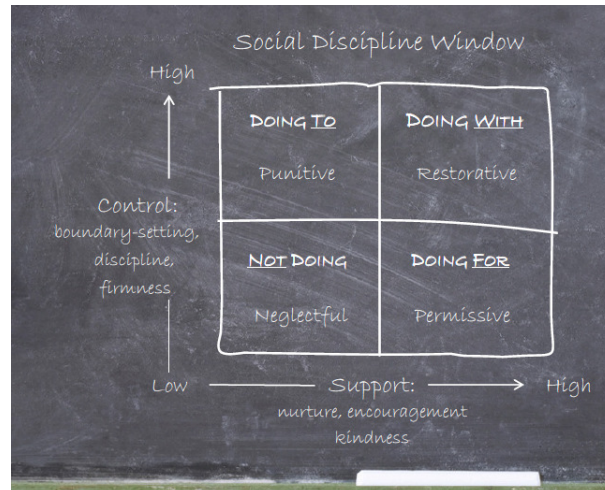
Occasional changes in routine, of course, are to be expected. Children thrive in the presence of adults who are happily enjoying themselves and each other at special celebratory events. When one of my favourite young caregivers got married, all the children in her care came to the wedding and danced the night away with their parents. Our sons could count on two really late nights a year when they were young — New Year's Eve and St John's Tide (June 25)... The important thing is for the adults to understand that the fussy behaviour their children may demonstrate the next day is probably not because they are purposefully misbehaving, but because they are off-balance from the extra stimulation and change in rhythms and routines. Knowing this can help the adults make wise decisions about getting back into routine as soon as possible for the sake of their children.

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[Cynthia Aldinger is the director of *LifeWays North America*. Copies of *Home Away from Home* can be ordered via the *Lifeways* website www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org.]

Being Good Enough is Pretty Good ~ part 5

I want to show you some views through a window — called by its architect Ted Wachtel the *social discipline window* — which can let you see the best way to be with your child. This window has four panes, and due to the unique nature of the glass in each pane, a different aspect of the social landscape appears:



First, looking through the top left hand quadrant of the window, consider that attitude of high-level *control* through which everything is done *to* the child. At its most extreme, it is a *punitive* form of management — either the child conforms or it is blamed and needs to be punished. This was typical of parenting in the fifties, when my generation experienced an authoritarian, moralistic upbringing, getting a sharp clip on the ear if we lacked manners. Obedience and duty were thus inculcated through fear — it was called 'respect' but in fact it was fear — through which no real sense of personal responsibility was fostered. The light through this pane of the window shines clear, but it is a cold light. It just isn't good enough.

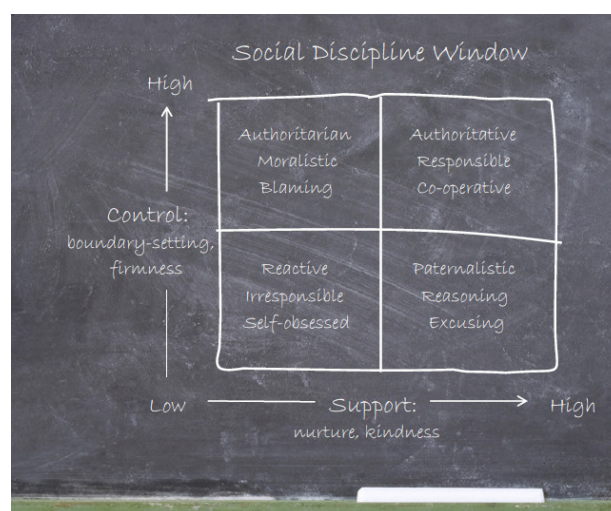
A contrasting form of child-rearing became apparent in the seventies, which we can glimpse through this warm soft light in the bottom right hand corner of the window. Childhood was idealised, and children were given a high level of *support*, but without any effort at control — they were not expected to do anything for themselves. It was done *for* them. It was believed that reason, indulgence, and good example would bring out the best in them. Philosophically this view derived from the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who believed that the innate goodness of childhood was corrupted by so-called civilisation. But the respect born of this often had no shape to it, no formal structure. The child could not be told what to do — 'bad' behaviour became excusable in a *permissive* society. This isn't good enough.

A third viewpoint, seen here in this smeared unclear pane at the bottom left, is that of the abdication of all responsibility — self-obsessed parents offering little in the way of control *or* support. I recall a parent talking about her teenager and declaring, "I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't! Well, it's just up to him now — I've signed off!"

The danger of such a decision is that he might have signed off too... The consequence of *not* doing anything has been a reactive, irresponsible societal attitude that is *neglectful* of the real needs of children. A lowest common denominator of survival prevailed. In such a world there were no assumed values except the survival of the fittest — which meant one's own. But this is never good enough. And thus we came into the nineties.

These are three distinct views, with the tendencies inherent in each. The fourth pane of the window however presents a view that has been developing in the past decade or so as a path of conscious action. Implicit in this view are high levels both of control and of support. Here we find cool-headed clarity, and yet also a warm light shining through. An authoritative principle of doing what is necessary *with* the full co-operation of the child is embedded in this view — that is, a humane view that society has a life and soul that needs to be cultivated, and that can be enhanced or damaged by our behaviour. In such a civil society, individual rights *and* responsibilities are strongly held — the *restorative* principles at its core ensure that this is what Dr Winnicott meant by a true *facilitating environment*.

Maybe I should say here that Ted Wachtel originally developed this window as a basis for understanding the principals of restorative justice. What I mean in this context by the word 'restorative' is that individual dignity is *restored and valued* within a strong container called the community. In this container, restorative practices are intended to help heal the harm done to the life and soul of society, so that you may feel enveloped and held by a real entity. A facilitating environment then flourishes.



This window then offers us a view on what is needed. Elsewhere (in a lecture-transcript 'Learning to Accompany the Child' on my website) I have elaborated this view in terms of *shelter* and *challenge*. And in my recent lecture 'Social Discipline and Restorative Practices' (also posted on my website), looking through this window I consider behaviour management in depth, primarily in the context of the classroom — though there is much there that parents could find valuable. Taken together, in these various presentations I think a comprehensive approach emerges which might interest you further...

My intention in this series of articles has been to offer you several instruments for homemaking — a personal filter to help establish your viewpoint; a filter for seeing into the home environment; a simple self-management tool and also a reflective tool for immediate situations in the family; and a view through a window towards the behavioural and social needs of your child. With these, you can look at a parenting programme like 'Bringing Up Baby' and decide for yourself what seems relevant. The foundations of Sir Truby King's work, for instance, are based on high levels of control — but you can ask yourself whether there is sufficient nurture and emotional support in his approach. Jean Liedloff's continuum concept, and its variants of attachment parenting, offers very high levels of support, and control is simply not an issue — until later, as many parents discover... Many of Benjamin Spock's views seem to me to provide a framework that enables parents to determine the levels of control and support required. He can seem dated, as can Donald Winnicott, and as can Joan Salter... But they provide real food for thought rather than a systematic method.

I do not want to criticise any of them. It seems to me that each is a person of their time, with messages that have spoken across time, but which also can become strident through their adherents. The most notable feature of that BBC documentary was that the proponents of each method could not listen to one another — they seemed irrational and rude. I looked at them through the panes of the social discipline window and had to wonder whether such fundamentalist behaviours could be beneficial at all. But in the end, I want you to judge — to judge me also — and to judge well. Your baby needs you to judge well what their real needs are, and what best meets them. Your baby needs you to be a *good enough parent*.

Think therefore about what you are doing — perhaps you have already established an authoritative, responsible, and co-operative holding environment, and then a facilitating environment for your baby, for your family, and feel affirmed in this by what I've said. I hope so. Perhaps some of what I've presented tonight is a useful contribution to your understanding of that task, and you are feeling encouraged in your vocation of parenting.

To conclude, let me quote Winnicott once more:

If human babies are to develop into healthy, independent, and society-minded adult individuals, they absolutely depend on being given a good start, and this good start is assured in nature by the existence of the bond between the baby's mother and the baby, the thing called love. So if you love your baby he or she is getting a good start.

And we can review a few of the significant phrases I've emphasised in this series of articles: *this little lodger, a going concern, given a good start, in a holding environment, which becomes a facilitating environment, through good enough parents...* In these clear terms, and in the light of love, it all seems quite straightforward, doesn't it?

~ John Allison 2009. The full transcript of this lecture can be found on my website.

Book Review: Tears into Laughter...

Turning Tears into Laughter: Creative Discipline for the Toddler to Preschool Years

by Lou Harvey-Zahra
The Five Mile Press 2010
ISBN 978-1-74248-046-6

What is the source of all this interest now in parenting? I don't recall my own parents reading books or attending workshops to learn about being better parents (and often it showed). Until Truby King published his book *Feeding and Care of Baby* almost a hundred years ago it wasn't a really significant public issue. Before then, wise men and thinkers generally had a great deal to say about the significance of childhood and upbringing. For instance, we frequently credit King Solomon with the statement, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" — but in fact you won't find that exact phrase in the Bible. Rather, it is an adaptation of several Proverbs, represented most clearly by "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." (Proverbs 13:24). I think my father knew that one; punishment was the foundation of discipline for my generation, to the extent that this word 'discipline' is now often associated with those difficult experiences. We shall return to this word.

Plato said some important things, two and half thousand years ago. And then in the late 17th century, John Locke wrote about early childhood education, although his essay *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* was not at all a practical manual for parents. His concept of the mind as a blank slate (tabula rasa) to be inscribed upon leads us to the principles of behavioural conditioning, however. Jean Jacques Rousseau was idealising childhood in the late 18th century, and his view of the innate goodness of the child has had an important influence on some modern attitudes towards childhood. But again, his writings are a philosophical rather than practical guide to daily parenting matters.

I believe that our preoccupation with parenting directly parallels the development of popular psychology; when Truby King was developing his practices, Freud and Jung were touring the United States, and suddenly it seemed the human psyche, its challenges and its development — its problems — were all the rage. And have continued to be... It was in the midst of this thrilling realisation that life is a problem that Benjamin Spock wrote *Baby and Child Care*; while over in England Donald Winnicott was articulating his fruitful insights and very sensible suggestions. Since then, however, parents seem to have become increasingly uncertain about their roles and responsibilities. We could spend a lot of time considering the reasons for this... Suffice to say, some see it as a problem, and while I agree that problems arise through the practised uncertainties and passing fads that now fill the spaces left by the demise of common sense, I'm convinced that we are wanting, needing to become conscious about what we are doing, how we go about it, and why. This is new territory, and the way through it is a 'creative' pathway.

I have deliberately highlighted these words, 'discipline' and 'creative'. Many would claim they don't belong together. In the Introduction of her recently published *Turning Tears*

into Laughter: Creative Discipline for the Toddler to Preschool Years, Lou Harvey-Zahra explains her use of the phrase 'Creative Discipline':

Let us separate the two words, 'creative' and 'discipline'. I use the word discipline in the sense of teaching, rather than punishing; one of the definitions of the word discipline is 'to teach'. This book will outline how to creatively 'teach' young children positive behaviours, while providing appropriate boundaries.

And it does. Lou recognises that learning takes place at the boundaries, where it counts. Her approach is energetic, playful, intelligent. Just a moment, I said to myself early on — recalling my workshops with parents and their experiences of despair, helplessness, 'failure' — what about the hard times? Where are they acknowledged? On page 7:

I understand that parenting a toddler is not always easy; I've also shouted and pointed my finger from time to time. Slowly, though, over time I have developed these Creative Discipline techniques and begun to change — although I am still working on this! Every parent has their off moments. We are all human. These 'reactive moments' may actually be needed from time to time, to teach your young child that nobody is perfect. Parenting is a continual process. In fact, it is an essential part of life for parents to acknowledge their mistakes and attempt to change.

So Lou isn't unaware of these challenges; however, throughout this book she looks for decisive, positive, transformative techniques. Such an attitude reminds me of one of my favourite quotes, from Nathaniel Branden's *The Art of Living Consciously*.

Pay attention to what works, do more of it, and try to understand the principles involved. And also: pay attention to what doesn't work, and *stop doing it*.

How valuable such an approach is! So often we become fixated on what isn't working — this increasingly limits us, stifles our creative vision, stunts the mind's capacities. We can miss the opportunity that exists in every moment. It seems that Lou has pre-emptive suggestions for every situation. The book is structured into three sections: Foundations, Strategies, and Practice. But each section is also practical. For instance, her foundational recommendations are all about the importance of rhythm, play, and nourishment — these are essential aspects of daily life, the basis for behavioural support. She also explains why it is important to get these foundations right — that is, pay attention to what works, do more of it, try to understand the principles involved.

Lou devotes some time developing this understanding of principles, but in a most practical, straightforward way. Then she proceeds to considering strategies; these are positive, direct, realistic, (and so importantly, good-natured and good-humoured). She is always looking for transformative possibilities. For instance, the first two strategies she considers are 'redirect, the positive way' and 'change the environment to change the

behaviour'. These are often not the first things we think of trying — they are derived from 'Least Restrictive First' approaches, as the first steps on a pathway of gently yet firmly escalating responses to behaviour.

Finally, she stresses the significance of what I call 'reflective practice' — to take some time out, maybe keeping a simple journal, to consider what is happening, how does it happen, why does it happen... Then build simple solutions. Throughout the book, there are clearly indicated sections suggesting Tips, and other distinctly different boxes containing Real Life Stories. These latter have been contributed by Lou's playgroup parents, and are the 'proof of the pudding'. (My one minor quibble about the book, however, is that the font and background make it a little bit difficult to read these interesting anecdotes.)

Some years ago, I was approached by a publisher who wanted me to write a book like this. Now I don't need to! And it's so good, I suggest that you buy two copies — one for yourself, and one for someone else — perhaps for a relative who doesn't understand why you want to be a conscious parent, that is, a person who recognises that parenting can be a vocation — or perhaps for a friend who is struggling with this challenging task. *Turning Tears into Laughter* will lighten the load and enlighten the mind. I believe it would be impossible not to be inspired by Lou Harvey-Zahra's good-hearted, infectious enthusiasm.

~ John Allison

In the Toolbox – positive family rhythms by Lou Harvey-Zahra

Toddlers love daily, weekly and yearly rhythms. Remember, rhythm does not mean rigidity; going with the flow is necessary too. Every family rhythm is different and unique, and rhythms can also change over time as children grow. Positive family rhythms can lead to emotional fulfilment, connection and, at times, greater family peace.

Reflection: Many parents these days are time poor. Make sure the time you do have with your child includes quality time. It takes presence to connect to a child. There are two questions to ask: "Did we have time today?" and "Did we make time today?" There is a difference. It takes just thirty seconds to sing a lullaby, twenty seconds to give a piggyback ride to bed, ten seconds for a hug, fifteen seconds to be patient, three seconds to look into a child's eyes, ten seconds to kiss a hurt knee better. Merely minutes or seconds, but these moments hold the power to change a child's life.

Reflection: Try to begin one new rhythm at a time. Reflect on what is most important for you now. Place it in a rhythm for a week, and then move on to the next rhythm. Before you know it, your simple daily life has changed. Write a list of what you would like to include in a daily, weekly and yearly rhythm: morning greetings, mealtimes, bedtime, rest end, weekly and yearly activities.

Go to Lou's website www.skiptomylouparenting.com for many more practical suggestions.