

Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus, Children Are From Heaven

John Gray

# Contents

Cover
About the Book
About the Author
Title Page
Dedication
Introduction

### 1. Children Are from Heaven

Every Child Has His or Her Own Unique Problems The Five Messages of Positive Parenting A Vision of Possibilities

## 2. What Makes the Five Messages Work

The Pressure of Parenting
Reinventing Parenting
A Short History of Parenting
Violence in, Violence out
Why Children Become Unruly and Disruptive
A Global Shift in Consciousness

## 3. New Skills to Create Cooperation

Ask, but Don't Order or Demand Use "Would You" And Not "Could You" Give up Rhetorical Questions

Be Direct

Give up Explanations

Give up Giving Lectures

Don't Use Feelings to Manipulate

The Magic Word to Create Cooperation

A Short Review and Practice

What to Do When Children Resist

### 4. New Skills to Minimize Resistance

Four Skills to Minimize Resistance

The Four Temperaments

Sensitive Children Need Listening and Understanding

Active Children Need Preparation and Structure

Responsive Children Need Distraction and Direction

The Gift of Singing

Making Chores Fun

The Gift of Reading

Using Distraction to Redirect

Receptive Children Need Ritual and Rhythm

Loving Rituals

**Practical Rituals** 

Giving Our Children What They Need

## 5. New Skills for Improving Communication

Why Children Resist

Taking Time to Listen

The Two Conditions

Hard-Love Parenting

**Soft-Love Parenting** 

Learning to Delay Gratification

Meeting Your Children's Needs

## 6. New Skills for Increasing Motivation

A Short Update on Punishment

Why and When Punishment Worked

The Positive Side of Punishment

The Simple Proof

The Alternative to Punishment Is Reward

The Two Reasons a Child Misbehaves

Why Giving Rewards Works

Negative Acknowledgments

Catching Your Child Being Good or Doing the Right Thing

The Magic of Rewards

Why Children Resist Our Direction

**Understanding Rewards** 

Rewards According to Temperaments

Sample Rewards

Always Have Something up Your Sleeve

A List of Rewards

Recurring Patterns

**Rewarding Teenagers** 

Dealing with a Demanding Child in Public

Rewards Are Like Dessert

Learning from Natural Consequences

The Fear of Rewards

# 7. New Skills for Asserting Leadership

Learning How to Command

Don't Use Emotions to Command

It's Okay to Make Mistakes

When Emotions Are not Helpful

Yelling Doesn't Work

Make Your Commands Positive

Command but Don't Explain

**Commanding Teenagers** 

Reasons and Resistance

A Better Way of Commanding

**Increasing Cooperation** 

**Choosing Your Battles** 

## 8. New Skills for Maintaining Control

The Need for Time Out
How Negative Feelings Get Released
The Ideal Time Out
Explaining Time Outs
Four Common Mistakes
Too Much Time Out
Not Enough Time Out
Expecting Your Child to Sit Quietly
Using Time Out as Punishment
Adjusting Your Will Versus Caving In
Hugging Dad
When to Give Time Out
Three Strikes and You Are Out
When Time Out Doesn't Work
What Makes the Five Skills Work

## 9. It's Okay to Be Different

Emotional Intelligence Physical Intelligence Creative Intelligence

Gender Differences Different Needs for Trust and Caring Continuing to Trust and Care Boys Are from Mars, Girls Are from Venus Mr. Fix-It Mrs. Home Improvement When Advice Is Good Boys Forget and Girls Remember Different Generations The Culture of Violence Different Temperaments How Temperaments Transform Afternoon Activities **Different Body Types** Different Intelligence Academic Intelligence

Artistic Intelligence
Common Sense Intelligence
Intuitive Intelligence
Gifted Intelligence
Different Speeds of Learning
Good Here but Not Good There
Comparing Children

# 10. It's Okay to Make Mistakes

From Innocence to Responsibility Whose Fault Is it Anyway? Learning Responsibility Hardwired to Self-Correct Your Child's Learning Curve Understanding Repetition Learning from Mistakes Learning to Make Amends Don't Punish, Make Adjustments How to React When Children Make a Mistake Doing Your Best Is Good Enough When it Is Not Okay to Make Mistakes Hiding Mistakes and Not Telling the Truth Children of Divorced Parents Not Setting High Standards or Taking Risks Justifying Mistakes or Blaming Others Teens at Risk Low Self-Esteem and Self-Punishment Making it Okay to Make Mistakes

# 11. It's Okay to Express Negative Emotions

The Importance of Managing Feelings
Learning to Manage Feelings
Coping with Loss
Why Expressing Emotion Helps
The Power of Empathy
The Five Second Pause

When Children Resist Empathy
When Parents Express Negative Emotions
The Mistake of Sharing Feelings
Asking Children How They Feel
What You Suppress, Your Children Will Express
The Black Sheep of the Family
Making Negative Emotions Okay

# 12. It's Okay to Want More

The Fears About Desire
The Virtues of Gratitude
Permission to Negotiate
Learning to Say No
Ten Ways to Say No
Asking for More
Modeling How to Ask
The Power of Asking
Giving Too Much
Children Will Always Want More
Children of Divorced Parents
The Longing of the Human Spirit

# 13. It's Okay to Say No, but Mom and Dad Are the Bosses

How Parents Affect Their Children
Coping with Negative Emotions
The Development of Cognitive Abilities
Children's Need for Reassurance
Children Have a Different Memory
Coping with Increased Will
Balancing Freedom and Control
Two Problems of Losing Control
The Nine-Year Stages of Maturity
The Development of Responsibility
Understanding the Generation Line
Divorce and the Generation Line

Controlling Your Preteens and Teens Using the Internet to Improve Communication Getting Support from Other Parents

# 14. Putting the Five Messages into Practice

Mothers and Daughters

Fathers and Daughters

Mothers and Sons

Fathers and Sons

Teens Secretly Appreciate Limits

What to Do When Your Child Takes Drugs

Dealing with Disrespectful Language

Permission to Speak Freely

Making Decisions

The Cycles of Seven

Why Teens Rebel

Improving Communication with Teens

Respect Your Teen's Opinions

Sending Your Teen Away

Instead of "Don't" Use "I Want"

Asking Your Children What They Think

The Challenge of Parenting

The Gifts of Greatness

Acknowledgments

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# **About the Book**

John Gray's *Mars and Venus* titles have brought a powerful message to millions of people across the world. In this groundbreaking book he addresses an area of fundamental importance for all our families – the well-being of our children.

In Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus, Children Are From Heaven John Gray provides the ultimate guide for parenting, addressing the unique bond that exists between parents and children. Geared to parents of children from birth to teens, this invaluable new handbook shows parents how to help their children become strong, confident, morally responsible adults by focusing on self-esteem and responsibility.

# **About the Author**

John Gray, P.H.D., is the author of eleven bestsellers, including Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus, which has sold more than ten million copies worldwide. An internationally recognized expert the field in interpersonal communication and relationships, he has been conducting seminars in major cities for twenty-six years. He is a Certified Family Therapist (National Academy for Certified Family Therapists), a Consulting Editor of TheFamily Iournal. a member of the Advisory Board Distinguished of the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, a Fellow of the American Board of Medical and Diplomate Psychotherapists and Psychodiagnosticians, and a member of the American Counseling Association. He lives in Northern California with his wife, Bonnie, and their three children.

# CHILDREN ARE FROM HEAVEN

Positive Parenting Skills for Raising Cooperative, Confident, and Compassionate Children

JOHN GRAY, Ph.D.

Vermillon

This book is dedicated with greatest love and affection to my wife, Bonnie Gray. I could not have written this book without her wisdom and insight. Her love, joy, and light have not only graced my life, but our children's as well.

# Introduction

AFTER MY FIRST year of marriage, I was the father of a new baby and had two lovely stepdaughters. Lauren was the baby, Juliet was eight, and Shannon nearly twelve. Though my new wife Bonnie was a seasoned parent, this was my first experience. Having a baby, a child, and a preteen all at once was quite a challenge. I had taught many workshops with teens and children of all ages. I was very aware of the way children felt about their parents. I had also counseled thousands of adults, helping them resolve issues from their childhood. In areas where their parents' care was deficient, I taught adults how to heal their wounds by reparenting themselves. From this unique perspective, I began as a new parent.

At every step of the way, I would find myself automatically doing things my parents had done. Some things were good, others were less effective, and some were clearly not good at all. Based on my own experience of what didn't work for me and the thousands of people with whom I had worked, I was gradually able to find new ways of parenting that were more effective.

To this day, I can remember one of my first changes. Shannon and her mother, Bonnie, were arguing. I came downstairs to support Bonnie. At a certain point, I took over and yelled louder. Within a few minutes, I began to

dominate the argument. Shannon became quiet, holding in her hurt and resentment. Suddenly, I could see how I was wounding my new stepdaughter.

In that moment, I realized that what I had done was a mistake. My behavior was not nurturing. I was behaving as my dad would when he didn't know what else to do. I was yelling and intimidating to regain control. Although I didn't know what else to do, I clearly knew that yelling and intimidating was not the answer. From that day on, I never again yelled at my kids. Eventually, my wife and I were able to develop other, more nurturing ways to regain control when our children misbehaved.

### **LOVE IS NOT ENOUGH**

I am very thankful to my parents for their love and support, which helped me enormously, but, in many ways, in spite of the love, I was wounded by some of their mistakes. Healing those wounds has made me a better parent. I know they did their best with the limited knowledge they had regarding what children needed. When parents make mistakes in parenting, it is not because they don't love their children, but because they just don't know a better way.

The most important part of parenting is love and putting in time and energy to support your children. Although love is the most important requirement, it is not enough. Unless parents understand their children's unique needs, they are unable to give their children what children today need. Parents may be giving love, but not in ways that are most helpful to their child's development.

Without an understanding of their children's needs, parents cannot effectively support their children.

On the other hand, some parents are "willing" to spend more time with their children, but don't because they don't know what to do or their children reject their efforts. So many parents try to talk with their kids, but their kids just close up and say nothing. These parents are willing, but don't know how to get their kids to talk.

Some parents don't want to yell at, hit, or punish their children, but they just don't know another way. Since talking with their children has not worked, punishment or the threat of punishment is the only way they know.

To give up old ways of parenting, new ways must be employed.

Talking will work, but you have to learn first what children need. You have to learn how to listen so that children will want to talk to you. You have to learn how to ask so that children will want to cooperate. You have to learn how to give your children increasing freedom and yet maintain control. When a parent learns these skills, he or she can let go of outdated methods of parenting.

### FINDING A BETTER WAY

As a counselor to thousands and teacher to hundreds of thousands, I was aware of what parenting behaviors didn't work, but I didn't yet know more effective solutions. To be a better parent, it was not enough just to stop doing things like punishing or yelling to control my children. To give up manipulating my children with the threat of punishment to maintain control, I had to find other equally effective methods. In developing the philosophy of *Children Are from Heaven* and the five skills of positive parenting, I gradually discovered an effective alternative to traditional parenting skills.

# To be a better parent, it is not enough to stop doing things that don't work.

The skills of positive parenting contained in *Children Are from Heaven* took me more than thirty years to develop. For sixteen years as a counselor of adults with individual and relationship problems, I had a chance to study what didn't work in my clients' childhoods. Then, as a parent, during the next fourteen years I began to develop and use new and different parenting skills. These new insights and skills have not only worked in raising my own children, but also in thousands of other families.

Marge, a single parent, began using these skills with her oldest teenager daughter, Sarah, who wouldn't even talk with her and was on the verge of leaving home. When Marge shifted the way she communicated, they were able to resolve their issues. Sarah changed literally overnight. Before Marge took a *Children Are from Heaven* workshop, Sarah would scowl when her mother talked. Within a few months after the workshop, Sarah was talking about her life, listening, and cooperating with her mother.

Tim and Carol had difficulty with their youngest son, Kevin, who was three. He was always acting out, throwing tantrums, and controlling situations. By giving up spanking and using time outs instead, Kevin gradually had fewer tantrums. Tim and Carol learned how to regain control in their family by understanding how to nurture Kevin's unique needs.

Philip was a successful businessman. After taking a *Children Are from Heaven* workshop, he realized how much his children needed him, and what he could do to assist them in growing up. He had been raised mainly by his mother and didn't really know how much a father was needed. Once he learned what his children needed and

what he could do, he was motivated to spend more time with his kids. He is grateful for this new information, not just because his children are happier, but because he is happier. He was missing out on the joys of parenthood and he didn't even know it.

Many men who are not involved in parenting don't realize the joys they are missing.

Tom and Karen were always fighting about how to raise their children. Since they were raised differently, they would argue about how to discipline or raise their children. After taking a *Children Are from Heaven* workshop, they had a common approach to raising their kids. The children not only benefited from more effective support, but also because their parents stopped fighting all the time.

There are endless stories of families who have benefited from the new insights and skills of *Children Are from Heaven*. If you have any doubts regarding their validity, just try them and see the results. The effectiveness of these skills is easy to prove. As you begin to use them, they work immediately.

The effectiveness of these skills is easy to prove. Use them; they work immediately.

Each suggestion in *Children Are from Heaven* simply makes sense. In many cases, your experience of reading *Children Are from Heaven* will clarify what you already felt was true or right for you. In other cases, these new insights will point out where you have made some mistakes and answer many of your questions. Although *Children Are from Heaven* does not deal with every problem you will

encounter, it provides a whole new approach for problem solving. You still solve the problems, but with a different and more effective approach. This new way of understanding children will assist you in coming up with your own unique day-to-day solutions.

Children Are from Heaven is a broad practical philosophy of parenting that works at every age. The new insights and skills work for infants, toddlers, young children, preteens, and teens. Even if your teens were not raised with these skills, they will quickly begin to respond to them.

Children Are from Heaven is a broad practical philosophy of parenting that works at every age.

In mv own experience, I found that mv two responded immediately stepdaughters to this new nonpunishing approach. Even though they had been raised with some of the old methods, like punishment or yelling, the new approach was effective. Children at any age, regardless of their past, begin to cooperate more as a result of using these new skills.

These techniques work even when children have been raised with neglect, abuse, or cruel punishment. Certainly, neglected or abused children may have unique behavioral problems, but these are more effectively corrected or solved as soon as this new approach is employed. Children are incredibly resilient and adaptable when given the right kind of loving support.

#### THE NEW CRISIS OF PARENTING

The Western free world is experiencing a crisis in parenting. Every day, there are increasing reports of child

and teen violence, low self-esteem, Attention Deficit Disorder, drug use, teen pregnancy, and suicide. Almost all parents today are questioning both the new and old ways of parenting. Nothing seems to be working, and our children's problems continue to increase.

Some parents believe that these problems come from being too permissive and giving children too much, while others contend that outdated practices of parenting, like spanking and yelling, are responsible. Others believe these new problems are caused by negative changes in society.

Too much TV, advertising, or too much violence and sex on TV and in movies are pegged by many as the culprits. Certainly society and how it influences our children is part of the problem, and some helpful solutions can be legislated by the government, but the biggest part of the problem starts at home. Our children's problems begin in the home and can be solved at home. Besides looking to change society, parents must also realize that they hold the power to raise strong, confident, cooperative, and compassionate children.

Our children's problems begin in the home, and can be solved at home.

To cope with changes in society, parents need to change their parenting approach. During the past two hundred years, society has made an historic and dramatic change toward greater individual freedom and rights. Even though our modern Western society is now organized by the principles of freedom and human rights, parents still use parenting skills from the Dark Ages.

Parents need to update their parenting skills to raise healthy and cooperative children and teens. Businesses know that if they are to stay competitive in the free market, they need to keep changing and updating. Likewise, if parents want their children to be able to compete in the free world, they must prepare their children with the most effective and modern approaches to parenting.

#### LOVE- VERSUS FEAR-BASED PARENTING

In the past, children where controlled by dominance, fear, and guilt. To motivate good behavior, children were made to believe they were bad and unworthy of good treatment if they were not obedient. The fear of losing love and privileges was a strong deterrent. When this didn't work, stronger punishment was given to generate even more fear and to break the will of a child. An unruly child was often called strong-willed. Ironically, from the perspective of positive parenting, nurturing a strong will is the basis of creating confidence, cooperation, and compassion in children.

Nurturing and not breaking a child's will is the basis of creating confidence, cooperation, and compassion in children.

Past parenting approaches sought to create obedient children. The goal of positive parenting is to create strong-willed but cooperative children. A child's will doesn't have to be broken in order to create cooperation. Children are from heaven. When their hearts are open and their will is nurtured, they actually are more willing to cooperate.

The goal of positive parenting is to create willful but cooperative children.

Past parenting approaches were aimed at creating good children. Positive parenting creates compassionate

children, who don't have to be threatened to follow rules, but spontaneously act and make decisions from an open heart. They do not lie or cheat because it is against the rules, but they are fair and just. Morality is not imposed on these children from outside, but emerges from within and is learned by cooperating with their parents.

Rather than seeking to create good children, positive parenting seeks to create compassionate children.

Past parenting approaches focused on creating submission; positive parenting aims to develop confident leaders, who are capable of creating their own destiny, not just passively following in the footsteps of others before them. These confident children are aware of who they are and what they want to accomplish.

Confident children are not easily swayed by peer pressure nor do they feel the need to rebel.

These strong children are not easily swayed by peer pressure nor do they feel a need to rebel in order to be themselves. They think for themselves, yet remain open to the assistance and help of their parents. As adults, they are not held back by the limited beliefs of others. They follow an inner compass and make decisions for themselves.

### **CHILDREN TODAY ARE DIFFERENT**

Just as the world today is different, our children are different. They no longer respond to fear-based parenting. The old fear-based approaches actually weaken a parent's

control. The threat of punishment only turns children against their parents and causes them to rebel. The intimidation of yelling and spanking no longer creates control, but simply numbs a child's willingness to listen and cooperate. Parents are seeking better communication with their children to prepare them for the increased pressures of life today but, unfortunately, they are still using outdated approaches for parenting.

The threat of punishment only turns children against their parents and causes them to rebel.

I remember my dad making this mistake. He would try to control his six boys and one daughter with threats of punishment. He had been a sergeant in the military, and this was the only way he knew. In some ways, he treated us like army privates. Whenever we would resist his control, he would regain control with the threat of punishment. Though this parenting style worked to some degree in his generation, it didn't work for mine, and it clearly is not working for our children today.

When his threat didn't result in obedience, my father would increase the threat. He would say, "If you keep talking to me like that, you are grounded for a week."

When I continued to resist, he would say, "If you don't stop, it will be two weeks."

When I persisted, he would say, "Okay then, you are grounded for one month, now go to your room."

Upping the punishment has no real positive effect and only engenders greater resentment. For the whole month, I just reflected on how unfair he was. Instead of increasing my willingness to cooperate, his action pushed me farther away. He would have had a much more positive influence if

he had just said, "Since you are not respecting what I am saying, I want you to take a time out for ten minutes."

Punishment in the past was used to break a strong-willed child. Although it may have worked to create obedience, it doesn't work today. Children are now more sophisticated and aware. They recognize what is unfair and abusive and will not tolerate it. They will resent and rebel. Most importantly, punishment and the threat of punishment break down the lines of communication. Instead of being a part of the solution, you the parent become a part of the problem.

Punishment makes you, the parent, an enemy to hide from instead of a parent to turn to for support.

When parents yell at children, it just numbs their ability to hear. To succeed in school and, more importantly, to compete in the free market or experience success in a lasting relationship, adults today need better communication skills. These skills are most effectively learned when children listen to their parents and parents listen to their children.

Children listen to their parents when parents learn how to listen to their children.

What happens when you listen to music at loud levels? You lose your hearing. The same thing happens when parents yell or make demands all the time. When parents today yell or communicate the way their parents did, it has a different effect. Children today will just be turned off, and parents will lose control.

#### **GIVING UP PUNISHMENT**

In previous generations, societies were suppressed, controlled, and manipulated by strong, punishing dictators, but it is not so today. People will not stand for injustice and the violation of human rights; they will revolt instead. People have sacrificed their lives for the principles of democracy.

In a similar way, children today will not accept the threat of punishment. They will revolt. Children today feel more intensely the injustice of punishment. When punishment goes in, it comes back out as increased resistance, resentment, rejection, and rebellion. Children today are rejecting their parents' values and rebelling against parental control at younger and younger ages.

Before they are psychologically mature or prepared to let go of their parents' support, children and teens are pulling away and rejecting the support that is so important for their development. They long to be free of their parents' control at a time when they need that control to develop in a healthy manner.

Before they are psychologically prepared, children and teens are rejecting necessary parental support.

Many parents recognize that the old methods of punishment don't work, but they just don't know another way. They hold back from punishing, but that doesn't work either. Permissive parenting doesn't give children the parental control they need. When given an inch of power, these children take a mile. Children quickly learn to use their freedom to manipulate and control parents.

When children are allowed to use strong, negative moods, feelings, and tantrums to get their way, they are in

control. When a child is in control, they are out of their parents' control. In many ways, they will develop some of the same problems of children who are raised with outdated fear-based skills.

When children are in control, they are out of their parents' control.

Whether a child is raised with fear-based skills or permissive skills, if the child doesn't experience that his parents are in control, he will rebel or reject any attempts a parent makes to regain or maintain control. Disconnected from his parents' support, his development will be restricted. By using the skills of positive parenting in *Children Are from Heaven*, parents can give their children the freedom and leadership they need to develop a strong and healthy sense of self.

### THE RESULTS OF FEAR-BASED PARENTING

The old fear-based practices of managing our children through intimidation, criticism, disapproval, and punishment have not only lost their power but are counterproductive. Children are more sensitive than in previous generations. They are capable of much more, but are also influenced in a negative way by old parenting skills like yelling, spanking, hitting, punishing, grounding, disapproving, humiliating, and shaming. When children were more thick-skinned, these approaches were useful, but today they are outdated and counterproductive.

In the past, punishing children by spanking made them fear authority and follow the rules. Today it has the opposite effect. Violence in means violence out. This is a symptom of being more sensitive. Children today can be more creative and intelligent than in previous generations, but they are also more influenced by outer conditions.

When children are more sensitive, violence in means violence out.

Children today can best learn to respect others, not by fear tactics, but through imitation. Children are programmed to imitate their parents. Their minds are always taking pictures and making recordings to mimic and follow whatever you say or do. They practically learn everything through imitation and cooperation.

When parents model respectful behavior, children gradually learn how to respect others. When parents learn how to remain cool, calm, and loving while dealing with a child throwing a tantrum, that child gradually learns how to remain cool, calm, and loving when strong feelings come up. Parents can stay calm, cool, loving, and respectful when they learn what to do when children go out of control.

Parents can stay calm and cool when they learn what to do when children go out of control.

If you hit children to regain control, children learn that aggression is the answer when they feel out of control. Many times I have witnessed a mother hitting her son, saying, "Stop hitting your brother." She wants him to understand how it feels, but hitting is not the answer. By hitting her son, she reinforces his tendency to hit or use aggression.

Later on, when he is not getting what he wants, he will automatically resort to acting out his anger by either direct or passive aggression. Although spanking or hitting children worked in the past, it backfires today. Fear-based parenting methods restrict our children's natural development and make our job as parents less fulfilling and more time consuming.

#### NOT ENOUGH TIME TO PARENT

Parents today have less time than ever to devote to parenting. For this reason, it is essential that they learn what is most important for their children. This knowledge not only helps them to use their time more efficiently, but also motivates them to create more time. A greater awareness of their children's needs naturally motivates parents to spend more time with their children.

In dealing with stress and pressure, many adults often devote time to what they feel they have to do and can do. Women commonly feel overwhelmed with all the things they have to do. Men feel primarily focused on what they can do. When fathers don't know what they can do to help their children, they often do nothing. When mothers are not aware of what their children need, they often make others things more important.

When parents learn what their children really need, they are less motivated to create money to acquire things and more motivated to create time to enjoy their family. The greatest wealth for a parent today is time. Parents begin to find more time to be with their children when they recognize what they have to do and can do.

#### UPDATING YOUR PARENTING SKILLS

By reading *Children Are from Heaven*, you will learn practical ways to update your parenting skills. You will not only learn what doesn't work, but what you can do instead. You will learn new ways of motivating your children to cooperate and excel without having to use fear tactics.

Children today do not need to be motivated by the fear of punishment. They have the innate ability to know what is right and wrong when given an opportunity to develop this ability. Instead of being motivated by punishment or intimidation, they can be easily motivated by reward and the natural, healthy desire to please their parents.

In the first eight chapters of *Children Are from Heaven*, you will learn to use the different skills of positive parenting to improve communication, increase cooperation, and motivate your children to be all they can be. In last six chapters, you will learn how to communicate the five most important messages your children need to hear again and again.

The five positive messages are:

- 1. It's okay to be different.
- 2. It's okay to make mistakes.
- 3. It's okay to express negative emotions.
- 4. It's okay to want more.
- 5. It's okay to say no, but remember mom and dad are the bosses.

These five messages will set your children free to develop their God-given abilities. When practiced correctly with the different skills of positive parenting, your child will develop the necessary skills for successful living. Some of these skills are: forgiveness of others and themselves, delayed gratification, sharing. self-esteem. patience. others themselves. persistence, respect for and cooperation, compassion, confidence, and the ability to be happy. With this new approach, along with your love and support, your children will have the opportunity to develop fully during each stage of their growth.

With these new insights, you will have the confidence needed to raise your children well and to sleep soundly at night. When questions and confusion arise, you will have a powerful resource to return to again and again to give you support and to remind you of what your children need and what you can do for them.

Most of all, you remember that children *are* from heaven. They already have within them what they need to grow. Your job as parent is only to support their process of growth. By applying the five messages and positive-parenting skills, you will not only enjoy the confidence that you doing exactly what is needed, but know that, with your help, your children will be able to create the life they were meant to live.

# Children Are from Heaven

ALL CHILDREN ARE born innocent and good. In this sense our children are from heaven. Each and every child is already unique and special. They enter this world with their own particular destiny. An apple seed naturally becomes an apple tree. It cannot produce pears or oranges. As parents, our most important role is to recognize, honor, and then nurture our child's natural and unique growth process. We are not required in any way to mold them into who we think they should be. Yet we are responsible to support them wisely in ways that draw out their individual gifts and strengths.

Our children do not need us to fix them or make them better, but they are dependent on our support to grow. We provide the fertile ground for their seeds of greatness to sprout. They have the power to do the rest. Within an apple seed is the perfect blueprint for its growth and development. Likewise, within the developing mind, heart, and body of every child is the perfect blueprint for that child's development. Instead of thinking that we must do something to make our children good, we must recognize that our children are already good.