

Book Review

The Mindful Parent: Strategies from Peaceful Cultures to Raise Compassionate, Competent Kids by Charlotte Peterson, PhD, 2015. New York: Skyhorse Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-63450-446-1

It's rare that I don't put a book down. With two young children, a private practice, a teaching position, and a to-do-list a mile long, I am as busy as most other humans I meet. However, I found *The Mindful Parent: Strategies from Peaceful Cultures to Raise Compassionate, Competent Kids* to be such a well-written and informative book, I read it virtually cover-to-cover in two days. I spent the last six years thoroughly researching attachment in the perinatal years for my doctorate, and the last nine-plus years reading nearly every conscious parenting book out there while raising my own children, and I still learned surprising new facts in every chapter of this book.

Peterson has written a heavily-researched and cited document that flows like an easy beach-read. That is no small feat. She addresses the ways in which peaceful cultures from around the world – the Tibetans, Bhutanese, and Balinese, for example – pass their nonviolent and deeply-relational cultural values along to their offspring by especially focusing on, and providing copious amounts of support for, the foundational years of life, from ages zero to three.

Peterson gives an overview of attachment theory and what successful attachment looks like in a family system. She discusses the importance of mammalian attachment in general. Then she elaborates on the human species' critical support roles for successful infant attachment – that of each parent, the extended family, and the wider community, including government assistance in allowing for parental leave during the first years of a baby's life. Examples of the ways in which many peaceful cultures work with these various pieces are interspersed throughout the book.

The book then provides guidelines for what Peterson has named the Mindful Parenting of Infants, guidelines which will likely appear familiar in this day and age to most who work with young children and families, and many who have young families. The incorporation of breastfeeding, baby-wearing, co-sleeping, loving skin-to-skin touch and cuddling,

keeping baby close by, open communication, singing and playing have been espoused by many as ways to promote healthy connection between parents and their children. However, in this country, that has not always been the case. Peterson does a good job of outlining the history of child-rearing in the United States (as well as several other countries), by including the various impacts of both historical events, such as the Women's Liberation movement, and ever-changing parental advice from influential individuals and books of different generations. The cultural landscape has changed dramatically, and with it, cultural parenting norms.

Peterson also addresses issues that might inhibit attachment, such as challenging birth experiences, hospital routines, postpartum mood disorders, and outdated belief systems. One of the most critical components that she touches upon is the parents' own attachment styles and how these may affect their baby's attachment to them. As a psychotherapist focusing on attachment, I felt that this issue in particular could have benefitted from expansion in the book. While understanding our own attachment styles and the childhood experiences that led to those styles is important, providing readers with more information on how to work through their own attachment issues, and gain support on that journey, is critical in not repeating attachment wounding with their own children.

Peterson then transitions to outlining parenting styles, and discussing how parenting toddlers and young children differs from parenting infants. Again, the importance of limit-setting and teaching one-and-a-half to three-and-a-half-year-olds socially-appropriate behaviors is not new information for many parents or those who work with young children and families. But Peterson's section on Mindful Parenting of Toddlers and Young Children incorporates simple steps to follow in this regard that encourage parents to stay connected to their children, while helping children maintain their dignity and feel deeply understood. Validating the child's feelings, communicating expected behavior, and using fair, firm discipline (versus punishment) to help the child learn when the child is not cooperating, are all gentle and effective parenting skills.

Peterson advocates time-outs only for dysregulated parents who need a moment to calm down, and time-ins for young children who appear out-of-control, aggressive, or non-compliant. Peterson's version of a time-in is where the parent waits next to the child and calmly inquires whether he is now ready to do what was asked of him. Peterson explains that this technique allows the child "time to listen inside" until they are "ready to change" their behavior, and that it can be initiated as soon as a toddler begins to understand cause and effect (usually between 14-18 months of age). Peterson writes that sometimes a parent will need to hold a very

dysregulated child in a way that doesn't allow the parent or child to be hurt, but also doesn't convey affection; she adds that conveying affection during a time-in for misbehavior could inadvertently reinforce the behavior.

The book also examines brain development, and looks at how to help non-biological parents of an adopted child encourage attachment. But some of the most interesting chapters fall at the end of the book, focusing on the stresses faced by modern families, recounting stories from families about how they balance careers and caring for their children, and calling for dramatic changes in how the government of the United States supports expectant and new families. Within this final section, Peterson attempts to rally support from Generation Y – those currently moving into early parenthood – to put pressure on the government to provide for rights, such as universal paid maternity leave.

The Mindful Parent is written in a way that both average parents and professionals in the field will connect with, learn from, and enjoy. I appreciated Peterson's thorough research, clear writing, and desire to make a real difference in the lives of children, their families, and communities at large, and will encourage the expectant and new parents I work with to add this book to their library.

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