

# Positive Child Guidance

*3<sup>rd</sup>  
edition*



**Darla Ferris Miller**

# ***Positive Child Guidance***

Third Edition

***Darla Ferris Miller***



Africa • Australia • Canada • Denmark • Japan • Mexico • New Zealand • Philippines  
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# Preface

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Parents and caregivers worry about discipline: “How do I get kids to clean up after themselves?” “How can I keep my toddlers from biting and pulling hair?” “What should I do when preschoolers call each other hurtful names?” “Am I being too strict?” “Am I being too lenient?” “How can I manage my own feelings of anger and frustration when children throw tantrums?”

Child guidance is the very challenging process of establishing and maintaining responsible, productive, and cooperative behavior in children. Adult caregivers must devote a great deal of time, effort, and persistence over many years to help children become considerate and self-disciplined members of society. Knowledge of the natural stages of child development is the most powerful tool adults have to guide youngsters successfully through this process of maturing. This book provides answers focused on developmentally appropriate guidance.

Self-discipline and self-control do not automatically appear out of thin air. Competent, well-behaved children do not just happen. Dedication and skill on the part of parents, early educators, and caregivers help children to reach their full potential. Effective guidance prevents behavior problems, keeps children safe, minimizes aggression, and builds a solid foundation for children’s future participation in society.

This book has been written specifically for those adults who make an invaluable contribution to society by caring for and teaching the youngest and most vulnerable members of society—our children. The book is intended as a road map to guide adults as they strive to meet the developmental needs of children from infancy through early childhood. Every child has unique needs. Consequently, no single guidance strategy will be appropriate for all children at all ages. This book addresses typical characteristics and needs of children as they proceed through chronological and developmental stages. It provides a broad range of practical, effective, and flexible guidance strategies that are based on principles of straightforward communication and assertiveness. The underlying theme is that of respect for the dignity and human rights of the infant and young child.

Much writing in the area of child guidance has focused only on behaviorist learning theory—a view that all behavior can be explained as the result of externally reinforced (or rewarded) learning. This view assumes that because a full understanding of the internal workings of the human mind is impossible, that process is therefore irrelevant. A key problem with exclusive reliance on behavior modification—ignoring negative behaviors and reinforcing positive behaviors—is that it may be carried out in an aloof or manipulative manner.

Additionally, rewarding children for behaving a certain way raises several sticky issues. Since human beings of all ages are infinitely complex, the praise or prize that reinforces one child may embarrass, bore, or alienate another. Doling out privileges and prizes may place an adult in the role of a stingy Santa Claus rather than that of a democratic guide and role model and may stimulate competition rather than cooperation among children. Doling out attention and praise as reinforcement risks implying to children that compliance is a condition for affection, that only “good” children are loved.

Another problem that undermines the effectiveness of behavior modification as a sole strategy for guidance is the contemporary child’s frequent exposure to many different adults and settings. Even intermittent reinforcement of a behavior through attention from children or other adults can undo an attempt by a caregiver to eliminate that behavior by ignoring it. The behaviorist caregiver attempts to control the child’s behavior by controlling the child’s environment—

a very helpful tool for guidance in specific situations but not a feasible overall plan for child guidance.

Strategies for child guidance should not rely only on methods for external control but rather must stimulate the development of internal mechanisms and motivations for self-control. In this way children can be encouraged to become independent and self-directed rather than dependent and other-directed. As they grow toward adolescence and adulthood, they will begin making more and more critical choices about what to do and how to behave.

Because imitation, or modeling, is a key avenue for early child learning, how adults cope with the stress and frustration of handling children's misbehaviors is critical. Children tend to do what we do rather than what we say to do. The purpose of child guidance is to support and direct the growth of effective life skills rather than only to bring about the immediate control of annoying behaviors.

Positive, persistent assertiveness is considerably more painstaking and time-consuming than bullying and intimidating children into compliance by scolding, screaming, or spanking. It definitely requires a great deal more thought and effort than giving up responsibility for children's behavior, indulging their every whim and assuming that maturation will somehow automatically bring discipline and self-control.

In child guidance—as in much of our instant, drive-through, disposable culture of expedience—the slower, more difficult method has special value. In spite of the added skill and effort required to carry out positive, assertive discipline, its impact on the child's personal growth and on the early childhood setting make it a worthwhile method. Positive, assertive discipline bolsters self-esteem, nurtures cooperativeness, and models socially acceptable coping skills. The early childhood program is a training ground in which very young people acquire and practice the skills needed for effective living. The personal characteristics and capabilities needed for survival in an autocracy or anarchy are very different from those needed for participation in a democracy. In a democratic country, early child guidance should begin the development of self-respect, awareness of and consideration for the rights of others, and recognition that persons of all ages, colors, and creeds should be treated with equal dignity, although each may have very different roles and responsibilities.

The ultimate goal of child guidance is the child's development of responsibility, self-confidence, and self-control. Inner discipline, based on an intrinsic desire to be a cooperative community member, is more functional to adult life in a democracy than sole reliance on external discipline based on an artificially contrived desire to gain rewards and avoid punishments. Of course, there is no place in any democracy for laissez-faire anarchy in which people wantonly trample the rights of others in their quest for self-gratification.

This book outlines practical, workable steps for creating a cooperative, respectful community of children and adults. Behavior modification will be addressed, not as the foundation of child guidance, but as a single, carefully placed stone in a solid structure of active guidance. Maturation will be addressed, not as an excuse to relinquish responsibility for child behavior, but as a powerful tool for understanding and responding appropriately to various stages of child behavior. The method presented is one of assertive and respectful enforcement of cooperatively developed rules and persistent protection of individual rights.

Aggression, passivity, and manipulateness are identified as hindrances to positive child guidance. They trigger negativeness, even rebellion, in children, and they model behaviors that are hindrances to successful participation in democratic community life. The role of the adult, in

this book, is that of one who seeks not to gain control over children but rather to guide them effectively while setting for them an immediate and tangible example of appropriate coping and assertive negotiation.

In this model, the adult not only guards the safety and individual rights of children but also stimulates their development of inner control by creating a functioning democratic community of children and adults. Positive child guidance means guiding children as firmly as necessary, as gently as possible, and always with respect.

This book is meant to be a lively, poignant, warm, and very human look at the process of adults guiding, managing, and coping with children's behavior—and children trying to deal with their own emerging needs and feelings as well as with persistent adult expectations. Although the book is readable, and at times even funny, it is based on a solid theoretical foundation drawn from the empirical study of social and emotional development in infants, toddlers, and young children.

## ***Acknowledgments***

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## ***Dedication***

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This book was inspired by and is dedicated to my parents, Evolee and Roy Ferris. “Papa Roy” did not live to see the book completed, but he had great interest in and enthusiasm for its writing. Because he grew up the youngest child of a troubled single parent during the Great Depression, he spent much of his adult life struggling to learn how to be a good parent and to let his children know that he loved them. When he read the beginning draft of this book, his eyes got a bit misty, and he said, “You’ve said some important things in here. I’m really proud of you.” Of course, no child ever outgrows the need to know she has made her parents proud!

As my husband, Tommy Miller, and I have reared our daughters, we too have struggled to learn how to be good parents and let our children know they are loved. Today we feel awe as we watch the beginning of our next generation emerge. Our beautiful first granddaughter, Fiona Ferris McDonald, slips her chubby baby feet into her mommy’s high heels, dons her daddy’s big baseball cap, and wobbles off toward the future.

## ***About the Author***

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Darla Ferris Miller holds a doctorate in Early Childhood Education, Texas and Mississippi teaching credentials, and the American Montessori Society Preprimary Certification. She is presently Vice President for Student and Organizational Development at North Harris College. Dr. Miller has served in a wide range of roles within the field of child care and development. She has been caregiver, teacher, center director, teacher trainer, professor, and consultant, and she has worked with children from infancy to school age. Dr. Miller’s publications include:

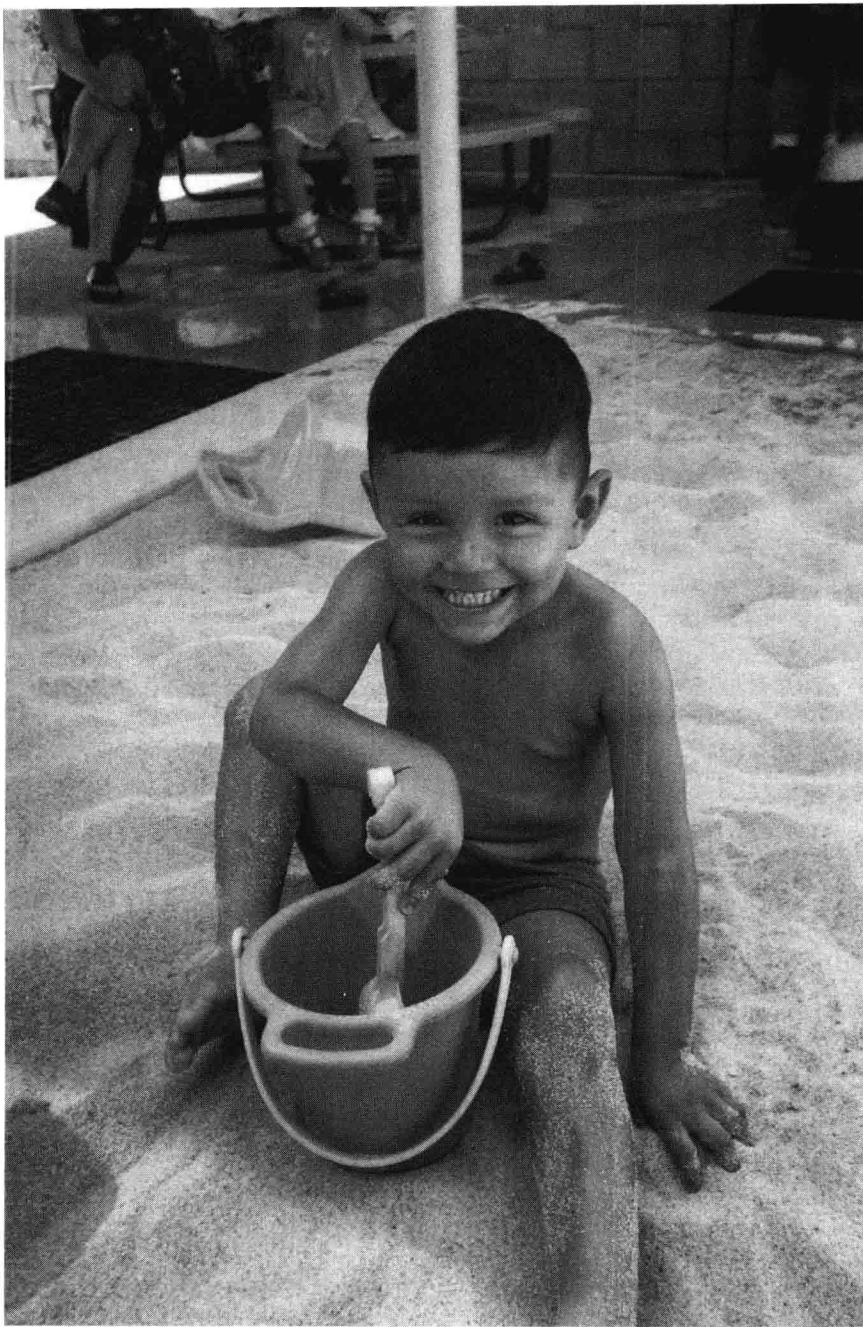
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Every child represents a new beginning full of bright possibility.



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# ***Chapter 1***

# **Introduction**

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## ***Chapter Outline***

### **New Roles and Responsibilities in Child Rearing**

#### **Short-Term Objectives for Child Guidance**

Respecting the Rights of Others  
Avoiding Danger  
Caring for the Environment

#### **Long-Term Goals for Child Guidance**

The Nurturing Environment and Long-Term Development

## ***Practical Application/Discussion***

### **The Spoiled Child—Myth or Reality?**

## ***Questions for Discussion***

## ***Points to Remember***

## ***Related Readings***

## ***Objectives***

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This chapter will assist you in

- Identifying contemporary practices in child care
- Defining responsibility for healthy child rearing
- Recognizing the purpose of child guidance
- Stating the criteria for creating early childhood rules
- Describing ideal early environments for optimum development



## ***New Roles and Responsibilities in Child Rearing***

At dawn every weekday morning all across the country, from bustling cities to tiny rural communities, mothers and fathers struggle to begin another workday. In millions of homes and apartments, parents hurry to feed and dress babies and young children. Without a minute to spare, they grab diaper bags and satchels, buckle little ones into car seats, climb onto buses, or push strollers into elevators. They head for a variety of child care arrangements—ranging from homes of relatives to registered family day homes to proprietary, religious, and government-funded child care centers. Stress begins early for today's parents and children. The world is changing dramatically, but children still need protection, nurturance, love, and guidance. Whether mommy is a full-time homemaker or a business executive with an urgent 8 A.M. appointment makes little difference to a toddler who plops in the middle of the floor and cries because he does not want oatmeal for breakfast. Child guidance is a challenging task for any parent, but if parents work outside the home, managing their children's behavior may be more complicated, and parents may rely a great deal on child care workers to support their children's social and emotional development (Brazelton, 1985; Coontz, 1997; Copeland & McCreedy, 1997; Curran, 1985).

Practical day-to-day responsibility for guiding the next generation is shifting from parents alone to parents and early childhood personnel working together. Today there are fewer traditional two-parent, single-earner families and rapidly increasing numbers of dual-earner couples, single parents, and other arrangements of employed households with young children (Blankenhorn, 1997; Duis, 1997; Elkind, 1997; Francke, 1983; Yarrow, 1991). At the same time that family structures are changing, more and more research has surfaced highlighting the critical importance of early experiences for the long-term development of a child's personality, character, values, and social competence (Adlam, 1977; Amato, 1997; Anyon, 1983; Baillargeon, 1997; Bandura, 1977; Begley, 1997a; Braun, 1997; Cook-Gumperz, 1973). Never before has there been such acute awareness of the impact early caregivers have on young lives, and never before has there been such need for people outside the family to assume major involvement in the process of child rearing (Campos, Bertenthal, & Kermoian, 1997; Chugani, 1993; Ehrensaft, 1997; Galston, 1993; Hamburg, 1992; Marshall, 1991; National Commission on Children, 1991).

Years ago, "babysitting" was a custodial time-out from the real business of child rearing (which was most often handled by mothers). Since "babysitting" represented only a brief interruption from day-to-day caregiving, any untrained but reasonably responsible teenager or adult could be relied upon to sit with the baby or child for a short time just to ensure that the child was safe and that basic physical needs were met. Now, however, about half of all babies and young children live in homes where the adults in the family work part- or full-time outside the home. Child care is no longer a brief interruption from routine caregiving but rather a major portion of it. Many children spend most of their waking hours in some form of child care by someone other than parents, from as early as the first weeks of life (Hamburg, 1992; Skolnick, 1991).

These changes place new expectations on parents and on early childhood professionals. Working mothers must face the stress of juggling family and career obligations. Fathers find that modern lifestyles present a new level of paternal involvement in caring for and managing young