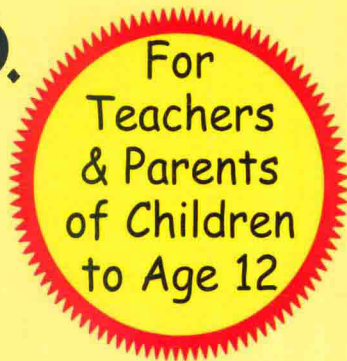


Michele Borba, Ed.D.

Parents



Do Make a

Difference

How to Raise Kids  
with Solid Character,  
Strong Minds, and  
Caring Relationships

With a Foreword by Jack Canfield, coauthor of  
*Chicken Soup for the Soul*<sup>®</sup>

# Parents Do Make a Difference

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Solid Character, Strong Minds,  
and Caring Hearts*

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Published by Jossey-Bass

A Wiley Imprint

989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741 [www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com)

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#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Borba, Michele.

Parents do make a difference: how to raise kids with solid character, strong minds, and caring hearts / by Michele Borba. — 1st ed.

p. cm. — (The Jossey-Bass psychology series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 10: 0-7879-4605-2 (acid-free paper)

ISBN 13: 978-0-7879-4605-0 (acid-free paper)

1. Success in children. 2. Self-actualization (Psychology) in children. 3. Self-confidence in children. 4. Child rearing. I. Title. II. Series.

BF723.S77 B67 1999

98-58112

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

PB Printing

15 14

## *Advance Praise for* **Parents Do Make a Difference**

“Michele Borba’s book is bursting with wise and practical ideas for helping kids develop the strengths of character—qualities like caring, self-discipline, and perseverance—that make us fully human.”

—Thomas Lickona, author of *Educating for Character*

“*Parents Do Make a Difference* is a godsend for parents. Dr. Borba speaks clearly and authoritatively about the things that matter most to a child’s success—not grades or test scores, but the ability to set goals, cooperate, and empathize with others, to be self-reliant and self-motivated, and above all, have high self-esteem.”

—Thomas Armstrong, author of *Awakening Your Child’s Natural Genius* and *In Their Own Way*

“Michele Borba’s new book is invaluable. Drawing on a lifetime of rich experience, the author understands parents’ concerns and speaks to them wisely and compassionately. Best of all, she spells out what parents need to know in easily accessible language and easily learnable stages.”

—Nathaniel Branden, author of *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* and *A Woman’s Self-Esteem*

“Packed with helpful suggestions and insights. This book is a wonderful guide to help kids become winners.”

—Louise Hart, author of *The Winning Family: Increasing Self-Esteem in Your Children and Yourself* and *On the Wings of Self-Esteem*

“*Parents Do Make a Difference* makes a huge contribution to the well-being of children. It’s positive, practical, and instantly usable. Kids across America will surely become more confident and self-reliant as a result of this wonderful book.”

—Naomi Drew, author of *Learning the Skills of Peacemaking*

“Dr. Michele Borba’s years of research and experience make her uniquely qualified as an expert in this field. The many practical and creative suggestions offered here are sound, effective ways of developing successful

human beings. I'm certain that this outstanding book will become an extremely valuable guide and resource for both parents and teachers.”

—**Robert W. Reasoner**, president, International Council for Self-Esteem and retired school superintendent

“*Parents Do Make a Difference* is able to address the core issues of parenting. Cross-culturally, Dr. Michele Borba has brought valuable insights to teaching professionals. Her parenting ideas have also been widely adopted by parent educators in Hong Kong.”

—**Ivan Yiu**, assistant community services secretary for children & youth, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, Hong Kong

“Every child arrives in life with a birthright to healthy self-esteem and to be welcomed, nurtured, and inspired by parents who abide by the practices Michele Borba recommends in this book. Applying these principles would quickly help the world become a much healthier and happier place.”

—**Senator John Vasconcellos**, 13th District, California State Senate

“Finally, a ‘cookbook’ for parents and educators on how to raise successful kids. My seminar attendees have asked me for years, ‘Wouldn’t it be terrific if children could be exposed to these principles of self-esteem?’ Michele, you’ve done it. The world needs your recipes for success—what a difference they’ll make in our kids’ futures!”

—**Bob Moawad**, chairman/CEO, Edge Learning Institute, and past president, National Association for Self-Esteem

“Michele Borba has done it again—she’s written another must-have, must-read book! Parents of grown children will ask, ‘Why didn’t they have this when my kids were younger?’ and then buy it for their grown kids so the grandkids will be raised sensibly. I highly recommend this book to anyone who cares about kids.”

—**Hanoch McCarty**, coeditor of *A 4th Course of Chicken Soup for the Soul*<sup>®</sup> and coauthor of *Acts of Kindness*

“This book is loaded with practical, proven ideas for teachers and parents to use in their efforts to be the best influence they can be. Children of all ages will be helped to develop skills they need to be their personal best in the new millennium.”

—**Dorothy Rouse**, board member and former teacher, Los Gatos Union School District, Los Gatos, California

“By applying the strategies from *Parents Do Make A Difference* I experienced such stunning success with a severely disturbed foster child that it caused an astonished juvenile court judge to label her transformation “miraculous.” He even led his courtroom in a round of applause for her success and credited her rehabilitation to Dr. Borba’s techniques. One could only imagine how using these techniques could profoundly impact the lives of all children.”

—**Dawn Hamill**, foster child advocate

“As one who works with foster children, I consistently look to Michele Borba for her expertise, insightful guidance, and sound advice. I personally have seen miracles occur in the lives of foster children who have been touched by the skills detailed in *Parents Do Make A Difference*. Because of this book, foster children’s lives are being changed—more importantly, their lives are being saved.”

—**Madelene Hunter**, recipient of the California Foster Parent’s Association’s President’s Award; founder, Madelene Hunter Foundation Serving Foster Children, San Diego

“I strongly endorse Michele Borba’s new book, *Parents Do Make a Difference*. Grounded in solid research, her message has the potential to truly help parents help their children be more successful in school and in life.”

—**Richard Herzberg**, executive director, Bureau of Education & Research

Parents  
*Do Make*  
a Difference

*To the ones who make the difference in my life:*

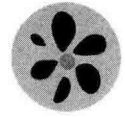
*My parents, Dan and Treva Ungaro*

*My husband, Craig*

*and*

*My children, Jason, Adam, and Zachary*





# Foreword

Jack Canfield, coauthor of  
*Chicken Soup for the Soul*®

Some psychologists have been asserting that parenting doesn't matter all that much—that the child's genetic makeup, which is determined at birth, is the most important factor in how a child turns out. As an educator and a parent of three who has taught thousands of students, I can just as confidently assert that the nature-not-nurture position is patently silly. Anyone with a lick of common sense knows, and any parent who has lived day by day with a child growing up knows, that of course parents make a difference. Sure, there are the influences of genes and peer group and the culture around us. But for heaven's sake, parents know for sure that they have a big impact, for better or worse, on their children's lives and that they had definitely better keep on doing the very best job they can!

Because you love your kids and want only the best for them, I am sure you have wondered what really matters most in parents. How do you raise kids with solid characters, strong minds, and caring hearts? As a parent and a parent educator, I'm always looking for new information and insights myself.

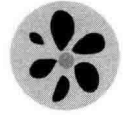
Well, you can stop wondering, because your question has finally been answered. What you have in your hands is the instruction manual on how to raise a decent, successful human being. It is a veritable treasure chest of ways to make your love for your children come alive so that you can help them learn to love themselves, realize their potential, get along and empathize with others, communicate effectively, solve problems, go for their most cherished dreams, and lead more successful and fulfilled lives. The fact is, this may well be the only book you will ever need on raising great children.

Michele Borba has gathered together some of the finest ideas and activities ever collected in one volume for parents. You will find evaluation lists that help you identify your child's skill strengths and weaknesses, dozens of quick parenting tips, simple steps that show you how to develop each success skill, and scores of practical activities you can use to teach your child the eight skills that matter most in success.

But that's not all! Michele has also included engaging stories about real kids falling short of their potential and the simple solutions their parents used to turn their lives around. She has listed wonderful children's literature selections and videos for family viewing that embody the eight success skill themes, as well as websites and valuable parenting resources. And she pulls it all together with a solid structure based on research. You'll have enough ideas to keep you busy for years!

My only recommendation: use this book! Keep it by your bedside and refer to it constantly. Consistently using the ideas Michele suggests will help your kids lead more successful lives not only now but also for the rest of their lives. Raising your kids in a loving, secure home and teaching them these success skills is the way you will make the most enduring difference in their lives. And what a difference you will make!

Jack Canfield  
*Santa Barbara, California*  
*March 1999*



# Preface

## You Do Make a Difference!

Last week I was in Lansing, Illinois, presenting a workshop for parents. I finished my talk and was sorting my materials when I noticed a parent standing a few feet away. She appeared to want to ask me something but was obviously reluctant. I introduced myself and asked if she needed anything. Her response troubled me deeply. “I just don’t know what to believe anymore,” she began. “I always hoped I could make a difference in my child’s life, but raising kids today, you just never know. I’m competing against their friends, the media, the movie industry, even their music. And now I’m hearing these reports saying parents don’t matter at all in how our kids turn out. So I was just wondering, do parents really make a difference?”

I thought of how many other parents must be sharing the same concern. I can’t count the times teachers have asked me if they make a difference in their students’ lives. How sad to doubt our significance even for a second! After all, *we not only make a difference but also can have an enduring impact on their lives, now and forever.*

Now I’m sure most of us would agree there are some “givens” we can’t change about our children, such as their genetic makeup and their innate temperament. But even those *are not* etched in stone: we can still modify

or enhance those characteristics. Sure, we can't change an impulsive child into one who is passive, but we can teach him how to temper his aggressiveness so that he can react more calmly. Of course we can't turn a timid child into one with an outgoing personality, but we can help her learn how to be more comfortable around others. And the latest brain research on how young minds form shows just how powerful we are in helping develop our children's brain circuits for the acquisition of music, math, logic, motor development, social attachment, language, and emotional control.

And how can anyone ever negate the power of a caregiver's love? A dad spending hours each night helping his child learn to catch because the boy so much wants to make the team; a stepmom gently showing her youngster how to cope with defeat; a teacher instilling in her student a "never give up" spirit; a foster parent helping a child recognize her artistic capabilities. Such moments can never be minimized, because they help children form images of who they are and teach them lessons of life that guide them the rest of their lives. Parents and teachers create the framework for children's success by helping them learn to believe in themselves, and doing so lays the foundation for their emotional well-being.

When I think back on my own childhood, images of love, encouragement, and warm family memories flood my mind. I recall evenings on my dad's lap listening to him read to me for hours. I have no doubt that those experiences instilled in me a lifelong love of books. Four decades later I can still hear my mom's words, "Treat everyone with kindness, Michele," in the same tone she used when I was young. The values that my parents modeled—perseverance, compassion, acceptance, and believing in myself—are the same ones that guide my life today. And they are the same values I try to model to my own children. You don't need research to prove your influence: just one moment of catching your child imitating your behavior or repeating your words or emulating your values should confirm that you *do* make a difference.

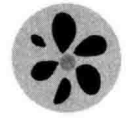
Some of the most powerful research in psychology addresses the issue of resilient children: kids who have been dealt numerous risk factors—poverty, sexual, physical or emotional abuse, dysfunctional family lives,

severe handicaps—but go on to lead successful, fulfilled lives. How did they overcome such trauma? Dozens of studies point to one variable: each child had in his life a caring adult who stuck by him and offered him hope. No one can deny that those adults made a significant difference on those children's lives. So whatever role you play in a child's life—mom, dad, stepparent, teacher, foster parent, counselor, scout leader—you can be critical in her life. Although this book is written primarily for parents, my hope is that it will be used by all caregivers. Besides, working together always increases our potential to help children become their best.

Common sense tells us we can significantly influence the direction of children's lives. And there's a simple reason: *the skills for living successfully are learned—not inherited; we can make an enormous difference because we can teach these skills to our children and to our students.* Handling life's ups and downs, getting along with others, setting a goal and not giving up until it is reached, knowing how to find solutions and resolve conflicts, communicating assertively, and doing it all with compassion and empathy are the skills that build solid characters, strong minds, and caring hearts, and they are all skills that can be taught. Although our love and affection may not necessarily make our children more self-confident and friendly, we can nurture the skills that do enhance the traits of successful living. And regardless of your children's innate temperament and genetic makeup, you can expand their potential by teaching them how to live more successful and fulfilled lives.

There's much we can do to enrich our children's lives to help them become their best. And that's really what raising kids is all about. Good parenting and great teaching are not about how to turn out little prodigies but rather how to help our children live their lives to the best of their abilities. And that in itself is an immensely powerful role. This book will show you the way.

Michele Borba  
*Palm Springs, California*  
March 1999



# Acknowledgments

Countless special people guided and supported me and made a difference in helping me write this book over these past five years. I would like to express heartfelt appreciation:

To the extraordinary teachers and administrators who allowed me the privilege of conducting research at their school sites to analyze the effectiveness of these eight skills of success and my *Esteem Builder* program. In particular I thank Gary Le Count and the staff of Jefferson Elementary School in Hays, Kansas; Dan Wilson and the staff of Crest View Elementary School in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota; principal Ron Sveinson and the staff of William F. Davidson Elementary School in Surrey, British Columbia; and Karen Whittle and the staff of Washington Elementary School in Great Bend, Kansas. One of the greatest honors of my life was working with such extraordinarily dedicated teachers. This book would not have come to fruition without their practical wisdom on how best to teach children these skills.

To the hundreds of teachers and parents from whom I have been privileged to learn during these past two decades—those attending my seminars who so openly shared their ideas; teachers whose classrooms I've observed and from which I always walked away more appreciative than ever of our education profession; and those whom I've known on a personal level—their practical wisdom has significantly shaped my writing. I

am especially grateful to Judy Joslyn, Karen Wasinger, Bob Tamblyn, Diane Archer, Nate and Pat Swift, Kelly Welsh, Janice True, Cindy Morse, Jim Meyers, Susanna Tsoi, Ken Kostka and his staff at Lakeview Elementary in Robbinsdale, Minnesota; Ivan Yiu and the Tung Wah Community Hospital staff in Hong Kong; and all the primary teachers with whom I worked for two summers from the New Zealand Principals' Federation. Special thanks go to Debbie de Ganna and the staff at Stockton Unified School District, where many of these parenting ideas were first introduced at parent workshops.

To all the individuals who were involved in conducting and analyzing the pilot site research, including Stacie Taylor, Terri Fitzharris, Dr. Diane Frey, Joel Chaney, Dr. David Kingsley, and Dr. Jack Dugan. To the folks at Jalmar Press and publishers of *Esteem Builders*: Bradley Winch Sr., Brad Winch, and Jeanne Iler for being there at the beginning and offering undying support in the first phase of my research.

I especially thank Robert Reasoner, whose work has been an inspiration not only to my own work but also to all of us in the field of self-esteem. I thank him for his invaluable suggestions, his heartfelt support in helping me with this research project, and for his steadfast dedication to helping all children become their best.

To Dr. Nathaniel Branden, for having a more significant impact on my work than he probably recognizes: his own work in the field of self-esteem was what started me on a twenty-year quest to discover how to help children succeed. Two decades later, he graciously introduced me to his agent as well as to Jossey-Bass. I thank him profoundly for his extraordinary generosity in helping me get this book published and for his encouragement, which helped me complete this project.

To my colleagues: Dr. Richard Herzberg, for first persuading me to do a seminar on success and then convincing me that the seminar would make a great book—as usual he was right; Dr. Merrill Harmon, for being there at the beginning to help me formulate the model of the eight skills of success; Dr. Thomas Lickona, for reading through the first draft and

offering such insightful suggestions; and Jack Canfield, for his twenty years of support for my work and constant willingness always to share such wise advice.

To two special friends: Jane Bluestein, for taking time to patiently talk me through the discouraging times; and Barbara Keane, for helping me hang in there by being just so fun and so loyal and by doing hundreds of hours of my carpooling so I could type and type and type. And to Judy Baggott, Cat Ayala, Jane Brewer, Andrea Funk, Madeline Hunter, Bonnie Gus, and Joan Weinger for their encouragement and friendship.

To my agent, Nat Sobel, for believing in this project and in me as a writer, and for knowing that Alan Rinzler would be the absolute perfect editor. To all the staff at Jossey-Bass—especially Wendy Bass, Kim Corbin, Katie Crouch, Bruce Emmer, Michele Jones, Danielle Neary, Margaret Sebold, Jennifer Whitney, and Lasell Whipple—their professionalism and dedication to producing only the best is a marvel. Most important, I thank my editor, Alan Rinzler, for so many things: his belief and commitment to this project; his uncanny ability always to pinpoint where a change was needed; his superb suggestions and insights; his formatting of this book into the exact vision I dreamed; and for taking care at every step, from the conception of this book to the finished product, to make it be the best it could be. I am blessed to have had an editor rich in skill *and* compassion.

And to my family: to my husband, best friend, and partner, Craig, for continually filling my days with love and fun and for being there to encourage me through every phase of this book and my life; to my parents, Dan and Treva Ungaro, for reading every line of every draft, always finding time to mail off critically needed research, and mostly for their never-ending love and steadfast support. What a different place the world would be if every child could have such parents! To my mother-in-law, Lorayne Borba, for her continual encouragement and upbeat phone calls that always ended with “I know you can do it”; and finally to my sons, Jason, Adam, and Zach, for all the love and laughter they bring to my life. And for all the times they asked, “Aren’t you done yet?”—well, it’s done!



Parents  
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