

THE RIE MANUAL:
FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS



EDITED BY MAGDA GERBER

Resources for Infant Educators

RIE Manual

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS

One Point of View	9
On Loving.....	11
Crying	14
Discipline	17
Toys	19
Time Alone	20
Learning and Teaching	20
Quality Time	21
Outdoors	23
Responsibility	25
Day Care Centers	28
Working Mothers	33
Wishes for Parents and Babies	35
The Importance of Diapering	37
Toilet Training	40
Sleeping	43
Ten Easy Steps to D.I.P. Philosophy	46

PART II: A PHILOSOPHICAL BRIDGE FROM HUNGARY TO THE UNITED STATES

Reflections Upon My Work With Dr. Pikler Magda Gerber	53
The Loczy Model of Infant Care Magda Gerber	55
Have Infants Been Cared for With Respect? Magda Gerber	68
A Conversation With Infant Specialist Magda Gerber About the Demonstration Infant Program.....	71
Notes on The Demonstration Infant Program Phyllis Sletten	74
Suggestions for Language Development Ann Davidson	78
What is Appropriate "Curriculum" for Infants and Toddlers? Magda Gerber	81

From Stress to Distress Magda Gerber	87
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PART III: FROM HUNGARY

A Quarter of a Century of Observing Infants in a Residential Center Emmi Pikler M.D.	90
Can Infant/Child Care Center Promote Optimal Development? Emmi Pikler M.D.	93
Forms of Hospitalism in Our Days Emmi Pikler M.D.	95
Developmental Schedules Stimulating Adult Educational Attitudes Judit Falk M.D.	103
Examination of the Social Contacts of Infants and Young Children Reared Together Maria Vincze M.D.	110
The Importance of Person-Oriented Adult/Child Relationships and Basic Conditions Thereto Judit Falk M.D.	115
Feedings as One of the Main Scenes of the Adult/Child Relationship Maria Vincze, M.D.	126
Postscript.. ..	133
Appendices.....	135

PREFACE

This collection of papers describes a special way of seeing and caring for infants. It is of value to all people concerned with infant care, including parents, infant carers, educators, physicians, therapists, those who implement day care programs, as well as those who advise or consult with parents.

The collection begins with practical suggestions for parents. Some of these articles are based on actual conversations between Magda Gerber and Cara Wilson, a mother of two sons. Ms. Wilson participated in an infant/parent guidance class led by Magda Gerber and was so enthusiastic about the help she received that she wanted to share the insights she gained with others. This led her to write a regular column in After Birth, a newsletter for parents of infants, featuring articles by and dialogues with Magda Gerber.

Sections of Magda Gerber's writings and teachings are included in Part II. Magda Gerber studied and worked in Hungary with Dr. Emmi Pikler. Magda Gerber has used the Pikler philosophy and methodology in her work with parents of infants and in her training programs for professionals in infant care. In her innovative programs and her lectures, she describes the application of the "Loczy" model to American culture. Resources for Infant Educators was founded to incorporate and disseminate this philosophy, referred to as the RIE approach.

The third part begins with speeches and articles by Emmi Pikler M.D. who directed the National Methodological Institute for Residential Nurseries* in Budapest, Hungary. Part III continues with papers by various members of Dr. Pikler's staff. When editing these articles we did not include extensive bibliographies, we used only selective references.

For simplicity's sake we refer to the infant as "he" and to the parent as "she" throughout this collection. It is hoped that the conventions of our language structure will be outweighed by the advantages of clear reading.

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*After Dr. Pikler's death in 1984, renamed the Emmi Pikler National Methodological Institute for Residential Nurseries.



PART I:

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS

Articles by and Conversations with Magda Gerber
excerpted from Cara Wilson's column in AFTER
BIRTH, a newsletter for parents.



ONE POINT OF VIEW

Cara Wilson

The key word in Magda Gerber's philosophy is RESPECT...respect for your baby and respect for yourself, the parent. An awareness of your child's point of view, as well as your own, will greatly help in building a respectful relationship. Such a relationship will be reciprocal — the child's nature will reflect back the love and respectful handling and attention he has received. Magda's approach involves a heightened awareness of the subtleties in the daily caring routines of an infant-parent relationship.

When you pick up your baby, first tell him what you plan to do. And when you want to put him down, tell him that, too. Simple! But how often people grab babies and plop them down like they were little dolls — loveable, but empty-headed. Talk to your child as if you are having a conversation with him. Help him to feel he has a thinking, feeling part of whatever you are doing to him and for him. Magda talks to children with such dignity. She treats them all, from infants to toddlers, with such respect. Respect for the child is the key to understanding Magda's philosophy. What happens when you respect someone is that you put a little distance between yourselves. That distance sets the two of you apart from each other, so that you can see each other more clearly.

Allow the child to experience conflicts and let him be active in them. Any problem that the child can handle by himself is good. Let him take the initiative as much as possible. For example, Magda moves the box where Daniel's truck has rolled. She doesn't hand him the truck. She lets him discover where it is, he sees it behind the box, crawls over to it, feels proud that he found it. With an older child, you direct him in a questioning way so that he can solve the problem by himself, thus learning to trust his own ability. It's not "There's the ball over there." Instead say "Where is the ball? Do you think it's over there? Where do you think it is?" Include him in the problem and in the solution.

The crying child is not instantly retrieved (if it's obviously not an emergency), but rather the mother remains calmly and peacefully in the child's view, her face not a mirror of his pain, but with an expression of strength and solace. The crying child crawls or walks over to mother. She lets him experience pain or sorrow without grabbing it away from him, and he is allowed to choose when he wants her comfort.

Try to hold back as much as possible before intervening with two fighting children. When you must help, try not to interpret their feelings. You verbally reflect what you see. Reflect. Magda uses that word a lot. It's really another form of keeping your distance and seeing things more clearly. Avoid imposing your opinions or emotions. When the fighting involves two angry children (old enough to understand and respond to verbalization) both pulling at the same toy, you simply restate the conflict as you see it. "I see you both want that toy. Steve, you want it. Paul, you want it too." By stating the problem and not imposing any value judgements, you give both children the feeling that you really understand where they're at. All the time you are speaking with the "aggressor" you are being gentle to him. If it made you furious to see him biting

or pulling hair or beating on the other child, let him know it, but don't bombard his aggression with your own aggression. Any angry response by you would simply reinforce or teach more aggression. At the same time you are gently calming the "aggressor" you are equally calming the "victim." Don't overdo your sympathy to him. Let him know you are sorry he's unhappy, see that he's not hurt anywhere and get him back on his feet. Too much sympathy and fussing over a "victim" makes him enjoy being victimized. This gentle approach to handling a screaming "fur-flying" moment works on babies, too. They might not understand all the words, but by saying "gentle-gentle" and stroking those poking, pinching, pulling little hands, the message gets through. Your peaceful attitude calms things down. By physically being gentle, the child learns what gentle means.

Choices should be in a child's life as much as possible, but they must be true choices. "Cheese or apple with juice?" is a true choice. You are prepared to give him what he wants. A false choice is "Would you like to go to the market now?" when you know your child has to go with you. He doesn't really have a choice, and that's deception.

Orders can be very good. Give the child simple, uncomplicated, direct statements. "I don't want you to go outside the gate." No long explanations are necessary. Simple "I" orders expressing your desires are enough for the child and easy to understand.

Food: Give the child less than what he wants so he'll ask for more. This way he can ask several times more for food and he will be eating as much as he wants, not as much as you want. Always keep a positive approach to food. Don't urge him to eat more than he wants. He should not be made to feel that he is eating to please you. This "ask-for-more" approach satisfies both the child and parent. The child feels totally in control of what he wants to eat and you, his parent, are pleased with his requests. You are helping him to enjoy food and the whole ritual of mealtime, and he's making you happy.

ON LOVING

If one were to list all the cruelties and maltreatments, both physical and emotional, that parents and adults inflict on children under the guise of love, the list would be a long one. But, going beyond such sinister examples, even kissing and hugging may or may not convey to a child that he is loved.

Love is a feeling, an emotional state. Artists, writers, philosophers, poets have tried to define it. Marcel Proust says, "Love is space and time measured by the heart." What is space and time? It is the here and now. It is you.

As unfortunately I am no poet, I will try to recall from my own experience how it feels to be truly loved by someone. It makes me feel good, it opens me up, it gives me strength, I feel less vulnerable, less lonely, less helpless, less confused, more honest, more rich; it fills me with hope, trust, creative energy and it refuels me.

How do I perceive the other person who gives me these feelings? As honest, as one who sees and accepts me for what I really am, who objectively responds without being critical, whose authenticity and values I respect and who respects mine, who is available when needed, who listens and hears, who looks and sees me, who shares herself—who cares. Cares. To care is to put love in action. The way we care for our babies is then how they experience our love.

How and when we	pick them up
	smile at them
	talk to them
	hug and kiss them
	tolerate their crying
	set limits
	restrain
	allow frustration
	allow free exploration
	allow free choices
	foster independence
	give clear messages of how we feel and what we expect

To come back to spoiling, as this word also has many meanings, I will now use it to mean not spoiling the child (by making him a brat) but spoiling his capacity to cope with life.

In the name of love --

We can "spoil" by overprotecting ("don't do this," "be careful," watch out," "don't touch").

Real care is to take the time and create a safe environment in which the infant can safely explore, and the mother and father can relax.

We can "spoil" by controlling ("do this now," "take this toy"). Many prescribed baby-stimulating projects advise us to do just that.

Real care is using the time we naturally spend with our babies, to learn, teach, experience together what is happening.

We can "spoil" by constantly entertaining, thus taking away their natural curiosity and capacity to entertain themselves. Boredom is not in a young child's repertoire in an adequate environment. We can easily condition a child to be bored, by over-indulging, doing things for him. This is faster and easier.

Real care is to allow the time, have the patience and encourage even the youngest baby to do whatever he is capable of doing for himself.

Ask yourself what your baby means to you?

- a plaything with whom you can play dollhouse?
- a helpless creature who makes you feel omnipotent?
- a puppet you can make dance to your tune?
- a love object who gives you sensuous pleasure?
- a pet who wags his tail when you praise him?
- an extension of yourself who will fulfill your thwarted goals in life?

Of course there is a little of all of these in all of us.

If my rumination on love leaves you more puzzled than reassured, here is a guideline: the combination of love-care-respect. Lucky is the child who grows up with parents who basically accept and love themselves (read Erich Fromm's The Art of Loving to understand that this does not mean selfish love) and therefore can accept and love their child, who reminds them so often of their own selves.

Crying, sniffing, wailing, weeping...what's a cry anyway? What does it mean when our children begin their lives with a cry? What's good and not so good about our children's tears? We all have a need for some kind of sane answer, some sort of guideline to lean on when we hear our young people wailing. I brought our questions to Magda.

Q. Magda, so many parents want to know why babies cry and what they can do about it when they do cry. What would you tell them?

A. What I do tell parents really depends on the age of the baby and on many other circumstances, but I would include the following: All healthy babies cry. We would worry if they didn't cry — no infant can be raised without crying. To follow the advice "Don't let your baby cry" is practically impossible. At times the harder a mother or father tries to stop the baby's crying, the more anxious they become. Both parent and baby end up "crying together," making a helpless couple. Watching any angry crying baby with a bewildered mother or father, I often wonder who is more helpless.

Q. But why do infants cry?

A. The immature organism has to adapt to dramatic internal and external changes. Think of the adaptation it takes for a man to leave the earth and go to the moon. Then think of the changes an infant experiences and has to adapt to when the child leaves the womb and enters our world.

According to scientific studies most crying occurs between 4 and 8 weeks of age. This crying happens regardless of how the parents respond to the crying. Speculation is that the baby spends the first weeks in a state of drowsiness and gradually becomes aware of the environment impinging on him. We believe that newborn and very young infants cry when they feel discomfort from:

1. Hunger.
2. Pain (could be gas, irritated skin, etc.)
3. Feeling too cold or too warm.
4. Sudden changes in position (equilibrium off-balance).
5. Sometimes a change from wakefulness to sleep and vice versa are vulnerable transitional times. Picking up a child has an alerting affect, so it is terribly hard for a sleepy, crying child jolted into the vertical position to once again try to sleep. Sometimes just letting the little one cry those extra parent-painful minutes before sleep can be crucial. Some children seem to really need to cry themselves to sleep.

6. Too much stimuli from environment (noise, light, activity) around the child. An often-repeated belief is that babies cry when bored. Actually, they cry when over-stimulated.

Also, contrary to common belief, babies do not cry when wet. They do cry, however, when they have a diaper rash which is irritated by a wet diaper or when the wet diaper causes them to feel cold.

A very young baby may cry to discharge energy.

Though there is a great variety of crying right from birth (and I'm pleased that Dr. Leboyer, Birth Without Violence, does not believe this has to be eliminated), as the baby grows the crying becomes more differentiated, more expressive crying. It becomes a form of communication.

- Q. What seems to be the common reaction by parents to the child's cry?
 - A. What different parents do seems to be greatly influenced by their beliefs (what they read or are told by "experts") and by their own needs. The parent who likes to eat would feed the baby often; the parent who feels too cold or hot will cover or undress the baby; the compulsively clean parents will change diapers frequently. Responding to rapidly shifting trends, parents will pick up, jostle, carry around and rock their babies. The way a parent responds to the baby "conditions," the baby expects specific responses (feeding, covering, rocking). Instead of responding to real need, the parent responds to a created need...conditioned by the parent. The wider the parent's repertoire, the more varied will be the baby's responses.

- Q. Magda, what does all this crying do to the parent?
 - A. All kinds of things. People react in different ways at different times, each in their own ways. It's really interesting. And crying triggers off all kinds of reactions.

It may:

alarm the parent.

arouse feelings of being more needed than ever before. This feeling can be a very gratifying one, almost giving a powerful feeling of omnipotence, as if the parent were a magician who can change an unhappy child into a happy one.

In contrast to this reaction is almost the complete opposite in the way of: great helplessness, bewilderment, frustration and often anger. Crying can change a concerned parent into a battering parent. Or to use a milder example, just watch the way the pacifier is thrust into a baby's mouth. The message is "shut up."

Q. Do you have any advice for us, Magda?

A. Parents need to try and change their thinking. Do not want to stop the crying. Respect the child's right to express feelings, or moods, whether crying or smiling. Try to find and eliminate discomfort. What will determine the baby's feelings of trust are the security in the child's daily life and the anticipation of a predictable rhythm. If the child's life is very hectic and unpredictable, then the only secure base is the parent. However, the next important task for an infant is to achieve some autonomy or the capacity to feel secure even without the parent.

No, it is not only what you do when the baby cries, but what you do all the time the child does not cry. This makes the difference between sensitive and less sensitive parenting.

Q. But Magda, you still did not tell what you would do when a baby cries.

A. I would ask the baby why he cries.

Q. A three month-old baby?

A. Yes. A child, no matter what age, will respond to your focused attention, your calm voice... these will eventually reassure the young person. The child will learn to give better cues and you will learn to understand him better. This is how dialogue between infant and parent develops.

To quote Sidonie Greenburg (author of The Wonderful Story of How You Were Born, and co-author of The Many Lives of Modern Woman) "Just as the smiles and gurgles and small sounds of satisfaction are infant language, crying is too."

DISCIPLINE

Close your eyes and mentally clarify how you feel about discipline. Open your eyes and write down your own definition of it. You may be surprised as I was after reading this dictionary definition of discipline: "Training that develops self-control, character." The root of the word is "disciple," which means to follow an exemplar.

If one would think of what is to be accomplished, what is to be achieved by discipline, there would be an entirely different feeling for what it is. With discipline, you must have a certain goal in mind. Basically, most parents are afraid of disciplining their children because they are afraid of the power struggle. They are afraid of over-powering the child, afraid they will destroy the child's free will and personality. This is a terribly erroneous attitude. A positive goal to strive for when disciplining would be to work at wanting to have children we not only love, but in whose company we love being. Lack of discipline is not kindness, it is neglect. Sometimes it is very difficult and even painful to discipline. It is easier to say, "Yes, okay, have your own way." But then what has been accomplished?

Confusion over discipline arises when you lose sight of what is important and what isn't. I will refer to discipline as the Red, Yellow, and Green Light. I'll explain. The Red Light is when the baby crawls on the floor right over to a big, sharp knife. Watching this, you don't stop to ponder about the effect grabbing the knife away will have on the child's psyche, you just cleanly reach and pick up the knife or the child. With "Red Light" there are no guilt-weighting, ambivalent thoughts. You just do what you must do immediately.

With the Yellow Light the situation can be negotiated. For example, the child wants you to be with him at the moment you want to do something else. Should you sacrifice your moment for the child's demands or is that not realistic just then? Again, we go back to knowing what is important at the time; not just for the child, but for you, too. It helps to be strongly attuned to your own inner rhythm — to know what your needs are, and to convey this to your family so they learn to respect your needs too. When you give yourself the same respect you give your children, that teaches the children respect for you also. Sacrificing your own needs for the child's only creates inward anger within both of you. If it is important that you finish reading the newspaper before you play with your little person, then clearly convey that message. Let the child know what it is you want to do for yourself and what you expect the child to do, so that playing quietly while you read can later grow into hours of secure separateness; both of you doing something independent of the other and still feeling good about your relationship.

The Green Light is when you want what the child wants. You give the child a few choices of something to do and you are ready to do any of them. We all need many green lights in life to be able to accept the reds and yellows, too.

It is not always easy for parents to say "No." A parent's ambivalances, guilt feelings and areas of confusion in his or her role will be picked up and used amazingly fast by children. They seem to have a sixth sense for it. Any