



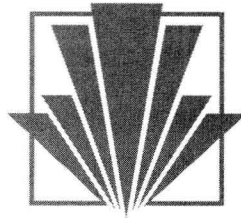
The Process of Parenting

FIFTH EDITION

JANE B. BROOKS

THE PROCESS OF PARENTING

F I F T H E D I T I O N



JANE B. BROOKS

Mayfield Publishing Company
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*To my grandparents and parents,
my children and their children*

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PREFACE

“For most adult humans, parenthood is still the ultimate source of the sense of meaning. For most adults the question ‘What does life mean?’ is automatically answered once they have children; better yet it is no longer asked,”¹ writes the psychologist David Gutmann after testing and interviewing men and women about the impact of parenthood on their lives.

Do people get training to succeed in this central life activity? No! Anyone who cuts hair for pay or drives a car must have a license and demonstrate a certain level of skill before being permitted to engage in these activities independently. But nowhere does society require systematic parenting education, which may matter most of all.

This book attempts to fill this educational gap. Like the earlier editions, the fifth edition of *The Process of Parenting* shows how parents and caregivers can translate their love and concern for children into effective parenting skills. The book strives to bring to life the child’s world and concerns, so parents can better understand what their children may be thinking and feeling. The book also describes the myriad thoughts and feelings—positive and negative—that accompany parenting, so parents can better understand themselves.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, General Concepts, Goals, and Strategies, includes Chapters 1 through 4. Chapter 1 describes the roles and interactions of the three participants in the process of parenting—the child, the parent, and the social system—and the ways social and historical forces shape parenting. Chapter 2 describes the role of parenting in lifespan development, parents’ goals in rearing children, and the ways people learn to be parents. The two basic tasks of parenting are detailed—creating close emotional relationships (Chapter 3) and establishing effective limits (Chapter 4).

Part II, Parenting at Different Ages, describes how general concepts and basic strategies are applied to children of different ages. This part begins with a chapter on how parents make the transition to parenthood, focusing on how past experiences with one’s own parents, as well as the present social context of marriage, work, and social relationships, influence the transition.

The next six chapters apply the general concepts to children in infancy, toddlerhood, the preschool years, the elementary school years, and early and late adolescence. Each chapter presents updated information on children’s physical, intellectual, and personal-social development for the six age periods, focusing on the ways parents can promote positive behaviors. In this edition, I pay particular attention to

understanding and promoting children's capacity for emotional regulation, which underlies children's competence in many areas.

A portion of each of these six chapters focuses on problems children experience at the given age. Because each child is a unique individual, parents require a variety of strategies and techniques for handling problems, depending on the child and the circumstances. The strategies of Haim Ginott, Thomas Gordon, and Dorothy Briggs emphasize communicating feelings and establishing relationships with children. Rudolf Dreikurs and the behaviorists emphasize ways of changing behavior. Parents can find solutions among these approaches if they adopt a problem-solving method that consists of defining the problem exactly, making certain that the problem is the child's and not the parent's, considering alternative actions, taking action, evaluating the results, and starting over again if necessary.

In addition to describing what parents do, the book describes how parents feel as they raise children. Stages of parenthood are identified, and interviews with parents provide information about what parents wish they had known about parenting before they started. The book also emphasizes the joys that parents experience. In 1948, Arthur Jersild and his colleagues wrote that most research on parenting was focused on the problems parents experience and little attention was given to "the cheerful side of the ledger."² Because this is still true today, I try in this book to address this imbalance.

Part III, Parenting in Varying Life Circumstances, describes how parents adapt parenting strategies to meet the common challenges of everyday life—both parents' working, single parenting and stepparenting, trauma striking a family, and having children with special needs. Chapters 12 through 16 describe the demands life circumstances make on parents and children and how parents with supportive help can meet such demands.

Throughout, the book describes programs that support parents. The final chapter takes this further, describing a systematic framework for understanding the roles supportive people and programs play in the process of parenting.

The book discusses cultural and social factors affecting parenting. As in the two previous editions, the fifth edition pays attention to the experiences of ethnic groups as they relate to special topics such as the formation of ethnic identity and bicultural identity and ways to combat prejudice. I do not have a separate chapter describing specific ethnic groups individually, in terms of particular beliefs and strategies. Individuals and subgroups within larger ethnic groups vary so widely it is difficult to construct a composite portrait that does justice to both individuals and the group. Further, I believe what unites us as parents is much greater than what distinguishes us. Though ethnic groups may stress different values and emphasize differing strategies, all groups rear children by forming relationships with them, setting limits, and shaping behavior when it does not conform to group standards. As such, we can all learn from basic principles and strategies.

The fifth edition follows the same structure as that of the fourth, but it includes updated information, expanded coverage, and new sections within chapters. Information on children's development has been updated from research described in the fifth edition of *The Handbook of Child Psychology*, published in 1997.

In addition to emotional regulation, particular attention is given to language development, social development, and the promotion of healthy behaviors in adoles-

cence. Chapter 9 contains an expanded and revised section on the school's influence on children's lives and ways parents can form alliances with school authorities to promote learning.

New sections contain information on the impact of infertility on parenting and on ways to engage fathers, especially single fathers, in parenting. There is a new interview with James Levine on this latter topic. Chapter 14 includes a new section on preventing violence in children's lives, and Chapter 15 contains a large section on the special needs of children who are poor.

I have written this book from the point of view of a parent, a clinician, a researcher, and a teacher of parenting. I hold the firm conviction that anyone who wishes to invest attention and effort in becoming a competent, caring parent can do so in his or her own way. The only prerequisites required are a desire to succeed and a willingness to invest the effort to do so. The results are well worth the effort. Having seen children face many difficult situations, I am impressed that children can live fully and happily even when temporarily engulfed by trauma, provided they have the loving support of a reliable caretaker.

Children are not the only ones enriched by adults' efforts to be effective parents. Helping children grow is an intense, exciting experience for parents in all areas of functioning. Parents' physical stamina, agility, and speed increase to care for infants and toddlers. Emotional stamina grows to deal with intense feelings toward children and to help them learn to express and modulate their feelings. Intellectual skills grow to answer young children's questions and, later, to help them with school subjects. In helping new life grow, we gain for ourselves an inner vitality and richness that affect all our relationships. Summarizing the importance of parenthood, Jersild and his colleagues conclude, "Perhaps no other circumstance in life offers so many challenges to an individual's powers, so great an array of opportunities for appreciation, such a varied emotional and intellectual stimulation."³ This book is written to help readers take advantage of such opportunities.

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Finally, I wish to thank my family and friends for their thoughtfulness and their company. I want to thank my patients for sharing their lives and experiences with me. I hope they have learned as much about life from me as I have learned from them. Most particularly, I want to thank my children, who are now grown and live away from home. They are very much in my mind as I write, and I relive our experiences together as I explore the different developmental periods. I find that I have learned the most important truths of parenting from our interactions. I believe that when I have paid attention, they have been my best teachers.

FOREWORD

The author of this book, Jane Brooks, has had a wide variety of professional and personal experiences that qualify her as an expert in child development. She is a scholar, researcher, and writer in the discipline of child psychology; a practicing clinician working with parents and children; and a mother. Drawing on the knowledge and insights derived from this rich background of experience, she has produced a wise and balanced book that parents will find valuable in fostering the optimal development of their children—helping them to become secure, happy, competent, self-confident, moral individuals. Dr. Brooks offers guidelines that are explicitly linked to major theorists (for example, Freud, Piaget, Erikson) and findings of scientific research in child development, so that the reader is also presented with a wealth of information on physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Students of human development and all who work with children professionally, as well as parents, will profit greatly from reading this book.

Brooks' approach to parenting incorporates many noteworthy features. Her coverage of the fundamental tasks and issues in childrearing is comprehensive. Included are tasks shared by all parents (for example, preparing for the birth of the infant, feeding, toilet training, adjusting to nursery school or kindergarten, the adolescent's growing interest in sex) as well as special, although common, problems (such as temper tantrums, delinquency, use of drugs, and physical or mental handicaps). Critical contemporary experiences such as divorce, single parenting, and stepparenting are also treated with insight and sympathy. Brooks' suggestions for ways of dealing with these problems are reasonable, balanced, and practical; her writing is straightforward, clear, and jargon-free.

Authorities in child development generally agree that the principal theories and accumulated findings of scientific investigations are not in themselves adequate to provide a comprehensive basis for directing parents in childrearing. Given the limitations of the present state of knowledge, guidance must be based on established principles of human development *plus* the cumulative wisdom and insights of specialists who have worked systematically and successfully in child-guidance settings. Yet many, perhaps most, academically trained child psychologists pay little attention to the writing of such clinicians as Briggs, Dreikurs, Ginott, Gordon, and Spock, regarding them as unscientific "popular" psychologists. This is not true of Dr. Brooks. After careful and critical reading of their work, she concluded that, as a consequence of their vast clinical experience, these specialists have achieved some profound insights about children and have thus developed invaluable techniques for

analyzing and dealing effectively with many problems that parents face. Furthermore, Brooks believes that parents themselves can successfully apply some of these techniques to resolve specific problems. Some of the experts' suggestions are therefore incorporated, with appropriate acknowledgment, where they are relevant.

The book is not doctrinaire or prescriptive, however; the author does not advise parents simply to unquestioningly adopt some "system," plan, or set of rules. On the contrary, Brooks stresses the uniqueness of each individual and family, the complex nature of parent-child relations, and the multiple determinants of problem behavior. In Brooks' view, each problem must be placed in its developmental context, and evaluated in terms of the child's level of physical, cognitive, and emotional maturity. The processes of parenting are invariably bidirectional: Parents influence children *and* children influence parents. Furthermore, families do not function in isolation; each family unit is embedded in a wider network of social systems that affect its functioning. Successful childrearing depends on parents' accepting these complexities, yet also attempting to understand themselves and their children and maintaining a problem-solving orientation.

It is a pleasure to note the pervasive optimistic, yet realistic, tone of the book. The author has recognized that promotion of children's welfare and happiness is one of the highest parental goals, and she communicates her confidence that most parents *can* achieve this. Underlying this achievement is parents' deep-seated willingness to work hard and to devote thought, time, energy, and attention to their children's development and their problems. Reading this book will increase parental understanding and thus make the difficult tasks of parenting easier.

Paul Mussen
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University of California, Berkeley

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