

Raising Your Spirited Child

**A GUIDE FOR PARENTS
WHOSE CHILD IS MORE**

**▀ INTENSE ▀ SENSITIVE ▀ PERCEPTIVE
▀ PERSISTENT ▀ ENERGETIC**

Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

"This book will prove to be a real life-saver for any parent of a difficult child....I confidently guarantee that the anecdotes and advice you will find here will improve your daily living."—Louise Bates Ames, associate director, Gesell Institute of Human Development, and coauthor of *Child Behavior*

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INTENSE • SENSITIVE • PERCEPTIVE
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Praise for *Raising Your Spirited Child*:

"A well-written, comprehensive, and above all loving and positive approach to understanding that oh-so challenging child."

—Evonne Weinhaus and Karen Friedman,
authors of *Stop Struggling with Your Child*
and *Stop Struggling with Your Teen*

"This is a marvelous, inspiring, usable gem of a guide for parents of these challenging and rewarding children. With its positive message of 'progress not perfection,' *Raising Your Spirited Child* is just what parents need."

—Marjorie Hogan, M.D., pediatrician,
Minneapolis Children's Medical Center

"Mary Sheedy Kurcinka packs these pages with wisdom, and has gentle, homey suggestions for keeping peace with children who are unusually intense, sensitive, perceptive, persistent and energetic."

—*Dallas Morning News*

"Our society values individuality yet organizes its institutions in such a way as to try to homogenize children. Mary Kurcinka's focus is a good antidote. *Raising Your Spirited Child* is an impressive and entertaining book that shows the stamp of Mary Kurcinka's experience as a mother and as a teacher."

—Stella Chess, M.D., Professor of Child Psychiatry,
New York Medical Center, and coauthor of *Know Your Child*

"Ten years ago, I would have paid \$1,000 for a copy of *Raising Your Spirited Child* had I known how much trouble it would have saved me."

—Debra O'Connor, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*

"*Raising Your Spirited Child* is loaded with how-tos—not how to change the child, but how to interact positively and minimize difficulties."

—*Bloomington Pantograph*

"*Raising Your Spirited Child* is a wondrous work. It offers practical strategies to solve, or at least cope, with the additional parenting burdens imposed by a spirited child. Best of all, the author reassures."

—Ann Ellwood, Executive Director,
Minnesota Early Learning Design

RAISING YOUR SPIRITED CHILD

Love
Best regards,
Melody

Dedicated to:

My husband, Joseph Michael Kurcinka—

without your insight, wit, and organizational eye I couldn't have done it.

My children, Joshua Thomas and Kristina Leah Sheedy Kurcinka—

without you I wouldn't have known.

My parents, Richard and Beatrice Sheedy—

without you I wouldn't be . . .

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In random order as always . . .

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THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

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GREETINGS!

Welcome to *Raising Your Spirited Child*. I'm Mary, your guide, licensed teacher of parents and young children, fellow parent of a spirited child. I have been teaching classes for parents through Minnesota Public Schools since 1976. In 1984 I developed a new curriculum titled *Raising Your Spirited Child*. I have to admit I did it for selfish reasons. I *needed* to talk with other parents who understood what it was like to live with a child who could scream for forty-five minutes because his toast had been cut in triangles when he was expecting rectangles. The kind of kid who would rather die than take no for an answer and knew the perfect trigger to "push my button." The kind of kid the existing parenting books either failed to address or did so in terribly negative terms—terms I wasn't willing to accept.

To my amazement and delight the class was an immediate success. Meeting together, we shared our feelings, concerns, and challenges. I brought in the latest research reports and studies of child development, communication, personality, temperament, and type. We hashed them over, tore them apart, and figured out ways to use them to help us get resistant little bodies dressed, fed, into bed, or through the grocery store with a little less hassle. By sharing our stories we allowed each other to peek into our homes, schools, and neighborhoods. We discovered similarities in the things we worried about and screamed about. We shared the rules that prevailed in our families, the discipline techniques that worked and those that didn't. We learned what each of us was doing to build a healthy relationship with our spirited child.

Over the years some of those who enjoyed and benefited from the classes moved away. Soon my mailbox was brimming with letters from New York, New Jersey, Kansas, and California seeking more information or one more reassurance that other parents of spirited children were alive and well. Others who stayed asked for information for their sister in Georgia, their brother in Colorado, their friend in Texas. The result is this book. A portable *Raising Your Spirited Child* class.

Although I couldn't package a dozen parents to send along for you, hundreds have been willing to share their questions, worries, favorite techniques, horror stories, and meaty moments. All the anecdotes are true, the ages accurate, but all the names, places, and descriptive details are those of a storyteller. People, I have found, don't mind us looking in their window as long as we don't share their address.

The stories are included here, not so much in the genre of how-to books but more in what Dolores Curran, author of *Stress and the Healthy Family*, calls the "how-they" books. Let the tales reinforce what you are already doing well or point out qualities in your child you might never have imagined. Listen carefully and they just might teach you new tricks or divulge deep, dark, secret emotions that you were sure only you had ever felt. You'll hear about kids' antics that yours hasn't even thought of yet, allowing you to count your blessings for the one you've got. They'll share with you the challenging, frustrating, exhilarating journey of building a joyful relationship with a spirited child.

Raising Your Spirited Child is based on the most recent personality development research. The verdict is still out as to how much of our personality is the result of genetics and how much is due to environmental influences. The soundest approach is a combination of both. What I've done is taken the most credible, the most renowned work and "tested" it in my classes with parents. Not in a scientific, theoretical approach but in a practical, "what makes the most sense" style. What helps us to understand our children better and to focus on their strengths? What eases the daily demands we face? The theories and techniques that were most applicable are included here. Use them as guidelines rather than givens. Take what fits for you. Use it and enjoy it. Leave the rest. Only you can truly know what you and your child need.

Finally you need to know the motto for *Raising Your Spirited Child*:

PROGRESS NOT PERFECTION

Being a parent, building a healthy relationship with a child is a never-ending process. There are good days and there are lousy days. With progress as our goal we don't have to wait for an obscure finale. We can

count every second of understanding gleaned, every power struggle fizzled, every hug held tight as a success. We can be kind to ourselves, rejoicing in moments of peace and hours of "parenting greatness," even if the entire day is not perfection. We can forgive ourselves the times we huff in frustration or flare in anger, recognizing that although we cannot be abusive, we are human. Progress takes time. The first spirited child class met for two and a half hours each week for six weeks. It wasn't long enough. We extended it to eight, then ten, and finally twelve weeks. It could still be longer. Changing attitudes, strengthening old skills, and learning new ones doesn't happen quickly. That's why we need to count each tiny success. Fortunately those teeny, tiny successes are like wet, sticky snowflakes: they can snowball. Rolled together they can build a happy, healthy relationship. So grab a cup of coffee, tea, or whatever you prefer and begin to discover the "secrets" of raising a child with "spirit." And remember, progress not perfection is our goal.

PART ONE

UNDERSTANDING SPIRIT

