

## **How Do I Create an Atmosphere of Goodness for My Children?**

In difficult times such as these with environmental disaster of almost unprecedented scale and concern about friends and others in Japan at the forefront of our thoughts, it is not easy to feel the goodness in life. In an external crisis, our urge is often to listen and see the news and to share our feelings with other adults. As a consequence, it is easy for the children around us to be exposed to things that they cannot understand, to become fearful about situations they will never see and cannot change even if we think that the media or adult conversations are not attended to by the children. Even pre-verbal children can sense profoundly the distress in our inner being.

But nothing brings stamina for life and daily well being to our children more directly and strongly than surrounding them and immersing them into an atmosphere of goodness and joy. For us as adults, the message they seek from us is this: "I am happy to be alive, I am interested in the world around me and I want to find a place for myself within it." Children are born with an openness to meet what their lives will bring. Despite their individual destinies and challenges, this openness is present and as the adults in the child's world, we have tremendous potential to cultivate this openness.

For the child just beginning life, there is one single mantra that needs to guide those early steps and years: *the world is good*. No other belief will carry him forward through the tumbles and stumbles, through the mysteries of his encounters with confidence and eagerness. Without this overarching rainbow of trust in life around and above them, children shrink back into themselves, lose the shine in their eyes, forgo the impulse to experiment, to see things as the adults around them never have, to imagine new solutions to the simplest experiments – piling blocks, washing a dish, dressing themselves upside down. *The world is good* – and therefore I enter into it, explore it, wonder, stop and look, touch, encounter, meet what comes to me with interest and growing confidence.

Fear paralyzes children — it reverses children's natural gesture of trust, openness, and interest in the world. To develop in any way – cognitively, emotionally, physically – children need to be able to enter easily into life around them. They need to feel welcome, and above all, safe. For who of us is able to take risks, try new things, when we have a question about the safety of our surroundings.

There are times when circumstances beyond our control create uncertainty or worse for our families. In addition, we could also say that our times are, in fact, uncertain times. At the same time, however, our children are just beginning their lives. We owe to them their birthright: the world is good and I am grateful and happy to be in it. "It is a safe place for me to grow in. And later, much later, I will be able to take on its pain and burdens. But give me time, peace, and space in which to discover the goodness in life for myself, in which to grow strong, capable, brave, and enthusiastic for life. Protect me from the challenges of adulthood until I am ready."

How can we do this for them?

- We can protect them from information that they cannot comprehend or digest – saving our adult conversations for later, turning off televisions and radios in their presence
- Give them the strength building elements of rhythm, form in daily life, predictability, that reassure them of the goodness and security of each day

I was once told that young children are very good observers, but poor interpreters. I, and many parents as well, have found this to be true.

Whether it be the large world and its sphere of difficulties, political situations near and far, our professional work and its daily challenges, our own personal frustrations, angers and fears – young children are not able to interpret any of these. None of these are a suitable menu for young children who cannot digest it. It all then goes inside of them to then be expressed in ways that we ourselves may not correlate with what they might have heard, for information about these realms of life will often bring anxiety, nervousness, fear, withdrawal, sleepless nights, or aggressive behavior.

As the adults in their lives, we have the possibility to stand there beside the children with confidence for life offering them a model for imitation. We lead them out into our world: we walk alongside them. We have seen much, experienced much. It is an amalgam of joy, of pain, suffering, discovery, celebration, disappointment – and at times of fear, questioning. All these experiences and feelings will have come to us by the time we reach parenthood. As adults, we have tremendous freedom to explore these feelings, to reflect upon our own experiences.

If we as adults listen to the outer world as it often presents itself, how do we then find our own paths to believing confidently in the goodness of the world? It is of utmost significance that we strive toward this belief, for our children look to us for signals, for images of where to begin seeking their places in the world. They imitate our deepest inmost feelings and beliefs, and these carry them far as pillars of strength when *they* require it.

Take a walk, find your way into nature, hold deep in memory the most recent good thing we have encountered. Begin and end your day with gratitude for the good in our lives – however challenging this may feel at moments. Pick a tiny bouquet of wildflowers or seasonal things from the nature just outside our doors – the wonder of one snowdrop or crocus in spring bloom emerging through the receding snow, a single acorn, one brightly polished apple – each of these can remind us of the wonder and miracles of the universe. Find a poem, even if you have never thought of poetry as your interest – just a few lines – copy it onto a piece of paper and put it on your refrigerator. Recall a human relationship that has helped you along your way. And see if, step by tiny step, you can rediscover, in difficult times, that the world truly *is* good.

Rudolf Steiner offers us a verse that can bring us strength in difficult times:

*Steadfast I stand in the world  
With certainty I tread the path of life  
Love I cherish in the core of my being  
Hope I carry into every deed  
Confidence I imprint upon my thinking.  
These five lead me to my goal  
These five give me my existence.*

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