

Special excerpt from

PARENTING *for* PEACE

RAISING THE
NEXT GENERATION
OF PEACEMAKERS

7 Ways to Rewire a Negative Mind



MARCY AXNESS, PHD

Coming in 2012 from Sentient Publications

Marcy Axness's efforts to educate our world are vital to our evolution! I'm so glad she's telling the growth-or-protection story because simple fundamentals are where the truth is. – **Bruce H. Lipton**, author, *Biology of Belief* and *Spontaneous Evolution*

I know of no one so well equipped educationally, intellectually, emotionally and intuitively as Marcy to speak to our times. – **Joseph Chilton Pearce**, author, *The Biology of Transcendence* and *Magical Child*, and many others

Dr. Axness has distilled compelling evidence from the fields of attachment parenting, preconception, and consciousness research into a readable, inspiring and hopeful book about what we really want to do as parents: raise peaceful people. Parenting For Peace gives us a roadmap. – **Peggy O'Mara**, *Mothering* editor-in-chief

Marcy Axness' book has a beautiful message supported by sophisticated understanding of the underlying science. I have borrowed her remarkable translations of findings from our NIH-funded projects in my own lectures. – **Curt Sandman**, fetal brain development researcher

Marcy Axness lays down the simple but profound principles and practices required to raise generations comfortable in their hearts and happy with themselves. A tranquil revolution of the soul and of the home that would benefit all humanity. – **Gabor Maté**, author, *Scattered*

Passionate and intelligent yet also profoundly simple, Parenting for Peace provides parents with the tools and support they need to create peace and participation in their families, their communities and the world. Highly recommended. – **Sarah J. Buckley**, MD, author, *Gentle Birth, Gentle Mothering: A Doctor's Guide to Natural Childbirth*

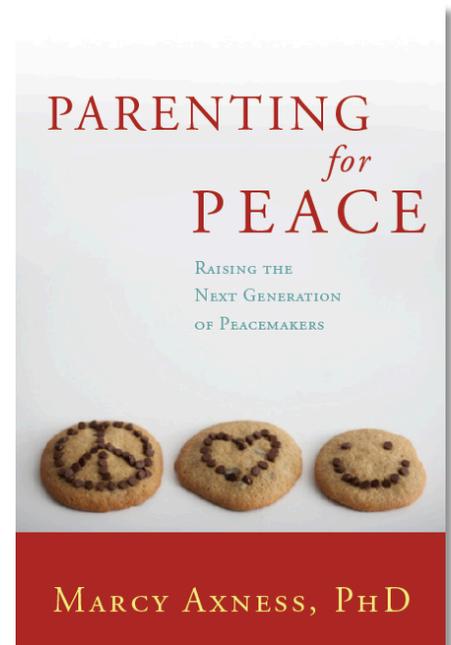
I applaud Marcy for calling attention to the importance of protecting the sanctity of the embryonic universe. World peace will only ensue from womb peace. – **Thomas R. Verny** MD, author, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*

Parenting for Peace is the ultimate thinking person's guide to nurturing a compassionate child from conception through adolescence. – **Scott Blum**, author, *Waiting for Autumn* and *Winter Moon Rises*

A significant aggregate of knowledge and wisdom woven into a very understandable story. It is well organized and clear, and could be considered "A Manifesto for Humanity," rather than a parenting book. – **Patrick Houser**, author of *Fathers-To-Be Handbook*

Dr. Axness brings a clear voice to the number one task for families and societies: to raise citizens committed to cultures of peace through the gift of knowing peace right from the start. And we can do so by "raising ourselves," in consciousness. – **Raffi Cavoukian**, children's entertainer, and editor, *Child Honouring: How to Turn This World Around*

In the midst of our global human, economic and environmental crises, we have been overlooking a powerful—perhaps the *most* powerful—means of fostering peace and prosperity: the consciousness with which we bring our children to life and shepherd them into adulthood. If we really want to change the world, we need to raise a generation “built for peace” from their earliest beginnings. *Parenting for Peace* is a scientific roadmap for how to hardwire kids with the brain circuitry for such essential peacemaker capacities as empathy, trust, self-regulation and imagination. The win-win is that a child wired in this vibrantly healthy way is a joy to parent, and later he or she will go out into our world equipped to creatively and confidently innovate solutions, and take pleasure in doing so!



Marcy is a soul guide in a world in need of her vision. – Kim John Payne, author of *Simplicity Parenting*

[The following is excerpted from *Parenting for Peace: Raising the Next Generation of Peacemakers*, solely for informational, promotional, or courtesy purposes, and not for distribution or publication. ©2012, Marcy Axness.]

Seven Ways to Rewire a Negative Mind, or, From Stressed Out to Connected Up

Where's Your Head At?

Whatever we surround ourselves with becomes a shaping force on our very being. Peacefulness, order and beauty in our environment support our inner wellbeing and health, from cells to organs to the whole bodymind system. Clang, clutter and chaos, on the other hand, can also become embodied physically and mentally. As without, so within.

What we put our attention on increases. When we focus on the positive—beauty, possibility, enjoyment—just as when we zero in on the negative—criticism, losses, everything that's wrong—it's like putting water and fertilizer on it, making either the positive or the negative flourish and multiply. This isn't just fuzzy “power of attraction” stuff; this is also Brain Function 101: when we tune our attention in a certain way—either positively or negatively—we initiate a flow of biochemicals that carve brain pathways for more neurons to travel down that same pathway in the next minute, hour, day, year. Our attitude and focus also create a subconscious template of perception that filters the millions of incoming bits of life's information and captures those bits that match our initial proposition.

Can you see how quickly this becomes a feedback loop, spiraling either up or down? Let's say I've just missed out on getting a job even though I was sure I had nailed the interview, my cat is throwing up all over the apartment, my rent payment is overdue and the landlady is getting harder to avoid. Each of these situations individually could unleash streams of brain chemicals (what neuroscientist Candace Pert calls “molecules of emotion”) to edge me toward upset, and when they happen all together, it wouldn't be unreasonable for me to have a bit of a meltdown. That's understandable, normal and human. The trick here is to find an exit ramp before I go completely off the rails: a short trip on the FreakOut expressway is okay as long as we take control of the wheel and get ourselves back onto the tree-lined avenues of Life.

While it can feel so weirdly satisfying to wallow in our misery—replaying the upsetting events over and over in our minds, complete with all the perfect comments we wish we'd made; talking to friend after friend about the awfulness of it all; holing up at home and cranking up the heavy metal—this emotion recycling makes it harder to make our way back to a positive outlook, simply by virtue of how our brain chemicals work. I'm not suggesting that you ignore your feelings, or cover them up with some fakely nice façade—yikes, that's a fast track to real mental problems!—but that you engage your healthy will and power of choice in deciding when the pity party is over.

Revising Old Programming

There are many simple and effective ways to do a pattern interrupt on spiraling negativity, whether it's sadness, stress, anger or whatever—and each time we make a

choice to exit that negative brain pathway, we rewrite those old operating programs we don't want, installing healthier ones. Here are a few that are tried and true:

- **Breathe.** Put your attention on your breath and mindfully take in some slow, deep breaths, holding each one for a few extra counts. (This encourages extra oxygenation of the blood going to your brain to help it cope with the neurons firing away like crazy in this intense moment.)
- **Notice and name.** The simple act of observing and identifying your emotions can help the brain structures driving those negative feelings to self-correct, and help you find your way back to a lighter, freer emotional tone. It also helps lasso your mind back from rehashing the past or rehearsing the future, to situate you in the present moment, the only place where true serenity can be found.
- **Focus on appreciation.** Think of something that pulls up the “appreciation” feeling from your mental file cabinet, and immerse yourself in that feeling now: it can be the memory of an event that made you feel wonderful, or the thought of a person whom you deeply love, or something exceptionally kind someone did for you. This is especially helpful when you're in the grip of angry feelings, because as sophisticated an instrument as your brain is, when you're in a stressed or highly emotional state, it becomes fairly primitive and can deal with only one thing at a time—either anger *or* appreciation. Research demonstrates that appreciation brings us into inner alignment at the levels of the brain, heart and mind.¹
- **Smile.** When we smile—even if it at first feels forced, because we're really in a funk—we do get happier. This puts the brain's own impressive pharmacy to work!
- **Nourish yourself.** Omega-3 EFAs (essential fatty acids) are the equivalent of motor oil for the healthy functioning of the brain. As our national fish consumption has dropped over the decades, our depression rates have indeed risen, and scientists think there is a connection. Getting your omega-3s is simply an enlightened, basic health practice—just like brushing and flossing.
- **Connect with others.** Spend some time in the real (not virtual) presence of someone with whom you feel comfortable, supported and safe, someone who ideally is grounded and centered. Thanks in part to *mirror neurons* (recently discovered by scientists in the field of interpersonal neurobiology), another person's calm can be contagious, and by simply being in their presence we can feel better. (It's important to keep in mind that emotional moods and social modes are contagious, so hang out with those people whom you want to be more like!) Humans are biologically designed to be in physical proximity to one another as a way of mutually regulating our inner physical and emotional states.²

But modern technologies seem intent upon prying us apart with the allure of awesome gadgets that are, ironically, designed and perceived as “connecting” tools. In today's iTwitterFaceLinkedInPod world, blogging, texting, IMing and tweeting are today's accepted modes of reaching out and touching one another, yet studies have found that people become more depressed and lonely the more time they spend “interacting with others” online!³ While electronic communication is amazingly convenient for sharing information, there is something fundamentally missing in those disembodied cyberspace encounters for the aspect of us that needs the full human connection. *Social Intelligence* author Daniel Goleman cautions, “This

inexorable technocreep is so insidious that no one has yet calculated its social and emotional costs.”⁴

One of the primary qualities that will characterize Generation Peace is *resilience*—the capacity to weather tough times and challenges with physiological, psychological and behavioral equanimity. Meaning, we don’t collapse, freak out, or smash things when the pressure’s on. It bears noting that people who score high on resilience feel comfortable reaching out, and that the interdependence of asking for help (and giving it back when help is asked of you) is one of the healthiest capacities a person can develop.

- ***Do something.*** I love a saying from Constructive Living: “Accept your emotions as they are and do what needs to be done.” If the dishes need to be washed, wash them. If the floor is nasty, sweep or vacuum. It may require an act of will, but tackle that messy corner of the room you’ve been avoiding. You can borrow a secret that poets and magicians use, the law of analogy: “As I am doing this, may this be done unto me.” So, as I am ironing out the wrinkles in my shirt, may my inner turmoil be smoothed away. An activity as mundane as scrubbing the bathtub can be surprisingly restorative when we immerse ourselves utterly and completely in each moment’s movement: the warmth and hum of the water, the pitted texture of the sponge, the tangy smell of the cleanser, the stretch of the arm muscles when reaching to the far side—and the satisfaction of the gleaming, ring-free final result.
- ***Which brings us back to appreciation!***

The Power of Appreciation

The suggestions listed above aren’t just for crisis moments, but are fundamentals for cultivating mastery of our inner lives, which is fundamental to wellbeing and peacefulness. Two themes prominent in all those activities are *connection* and *appreciation*, both of which have emerged as superstars in human health research. The field of positive psychology finds that the single most potent means of amping up our joy—and also our physical energy and wellbeing—is to cultivate gratitude. Scientists talk about keeping a gratitude journal, writing gratitude letters, and an exercise one doctor calls “three blessings,” in which you take time each day to write about three things that went well, and why.⁵

Even more simply, though, appreciation can take the form of noticing more fully some of the numerous things we normally take for granted in daily life. For example, the small act of eating a piece of fruit can take on a whole new dimension when we turn our attention to what is embodied in that apple—seasons of nurturance by rains, sun, and those who cared for its tree—and to the amazing fact that the flesh of that fruit will be transmuted into *us* in the coming hours and days. When we consider the research on the effects of human consciousness upon plants and water, it doesn’t seem like such a bad idea—indeed, most likely a wonderful idea—to appreciate an apple (or anything else) as we prepare to make it part of us!

The very phenomenon of a shower is an amazing, deeply pleasurable thing. People in many parts of the world would find a shower utterly miraculous. It can be a wonderfully centering (and surprisingly challenging) practice to shower with full engagement: rather than rehearsing for the day ahead, or replaying yesterday, or detouring to any of the gazillion places our minds tend to pull us when we shift into auto-

pilot, try to keep all of you, mind and body, in the present as you soap up, shampoo, rinse and repeat. Engage fully in each of the delicious sensations a shower offers. It becomes almost impossible to not feel gratitude for such a sensuous treat. This level of noticing and appreciating lies at the heart of P for P Principle #1, Presence, and will serve you richly throughout your parenting journey—and through your life!

Notes

¹ McCraty, Rollin, Mike Atkinson, and Dana Tomasino. *Science of the Heart: Exploring the Role of the Heart in Human Performance*. Boulder Creek, CA: Institute of HeartMath, 2001. A free download of this monograph is available at www.heartmath.org/free-services/downloads/free-download-library.html.

² Lewis, Thomas, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon. *A General Theory of Love*. New York: Random House, 2000.

³ Harmon, Amy. "Researchers Find Sad, Lonely World in Cyberspace." In *New York Times*: New York Times Company, 1998. This article details the first such study; many have been done since, and they have reached similar conclusions—that the more time someone spends online, the less happy and more depressed he or she is likely to be. Just two hours of surfing the net *per week* was associated with various forms of anxiety and depression, leading to reclusiveness and feelings of alienation. And, they were passionate consumers!

⁴ Goleman, Daniel. *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*. New York: Bantam/Dell, 2006, pg. 7.

⁵ Wallis, Claudia. "The New Science of Happiness." *Time*, Jan. 17 2005, A3-A9.