
Cooperative and Connected

ALSO BY ALETHA J. SOLTER, PH.D.

The Aware Baby

Tears and Tantrums

Raising Drug-Free Kids

Attachment Play

Cooperative and Connected

Helping Children Flourish
without Punishments or Rewards

Aletha J. Solter, PH.D.

SHINING STAR PRESS ★ GOLETA, CALIFORNIA

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Printed in the United States of America

A previous edition of this book was published in 1989 with the title *Helping Young Children Flourish*.

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Published by Shining Star Press
Post Office Box 206
Goleta, California 93116, U.S.A.
Phone & Fax: (805) 968-1868
Email: info@awareparenting.com
Website: www.awareparenting.com (The Aware Parenting Institute)

Book design: Studio E Books, Santa Barbara

Cover photo credit: [iStock.com/BraunS](https://www.istock.com/BraunS)

First printing 2018

PUBLISHER'S CATALOGING INFORMATION

Solter, Aletha Jauch, 1945-

Cooperative and connected: helping children flourish without punishments or rewards / Aletha J. Solter

Continues: *The aware baby*.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN: 978-0-9613073-9-4

1. Child psychology. 2. Child rearing. 3. Parenting. 4. Parent and child. I. Title.

Dewey Decimal Classification: 649.1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017919311

*“If we are to attain real peace in this world,
we will have to begin with the children.”*

—Gandhi

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my friends and colleagues who suggested that I write the first edition of this book (in 1989). I am also grateful to all the parents who let me interview them. Their names and those of their children have been changed (except for those of my own children, used with their permission). I have kept many of these examples in this revised edition. I would also like to acknowledge my clients and workshop attendees around the world who have given me new insights and helped me clarify this approach by asking questions and sharing their experiences. Finally, I would like to thank the people who gave me feedback for this new edition. The following people read all or parts of the manuscript and made helpful suggestions: my husband, Ken Solter, my son, Nicholas Solter, my daughter-in-law, Sonja Solter, my daughter, Sarah Solter, and my colleague, Heather Stevenson.

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Warning/Disclaimer

This book is an educational resource for parents focusing on the developmental, emotional, and educational needs of children between two and eight years of age. It is not intended to be a substitute for medical, psychological, or educational advice or treatment. Some of the behaviors and symptoms mentioned in this book can be an indication of serious emotional, medical, behavioral, or developmental disorders. If your child is suffering from problems of any kind, you are strongly advised to seek professional advice and treatment from competent professionals. Some of the suggestions in this book may not be appropriate under all conditions or with all children. The author and publisher offer no guarantee for the effectiveness of the suggestions in this book, and they shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any damage caused, or alleged to be caused, directly or indirectly by the information contained in this book.

Preface to the New Edition

This book was first published in 1989 with the title, *Helping Young Children Flourish*. It is a sequel to *The Aware Baby*, and these first two books describe the complete Aware Parenting approach from birth to age eight. I have written three other books that focus on specific aspects of this approach: *Tears and Tantrums*, *Attachment Play*, and *Raising Drug-Free Kids*. I am delighted that my books have been translated into many languages.

For this revised and updated edition (with a new title), I have kept the basic organization, but I have included new information, insights, and summary charts. Research studies continue to validate and support this approach to parenting, and I am pleased to share some of these more recent research findings in this new edition.

This book contains many examples of my own children, who are now adults. I can say with confidence that this approach works. I never used punishments or rewards, and my children never rebelled, because they didn't have anything to rebel against. My husband and I enjoy a close relationship with both of them. I am thrilled that our grandchildren are being raised with this approach, and they, too, are flourishing.

In 1990, I founded the Aware Parenting Institute to help spread this approach around the world. I developed a certification program for people who want to teach this approach to parents, and there are now certified instructors in many countries. Please see the Aware Parenting website for more information: www.awareparenting.com.

Cooperative and Connected

Introduction

THIS BOOK COVERS the period from two to eight years, normally referred to as early childhood. It is a sequel to *The Aware Baby* (birth to age two-and-a-half). You do not need to read *The Aware Baby* in order to understand the present book, which is self-explanatory and complete in itself. However, if you wish to gain a deeper understanding of babies' emotional needs and development, *The Aware Baby* may provide you with some insights and helpful information.

The approach described in this book is based on research in the fields of attachment, trauma, child development, neurophysiology, and psychotherapy. It focuses on children's emotional and developmental needs and on the parent/child relationship. Thanks to research psychologists, there is a wealth of information about young children's development, and we now have a fairly clear idea of how they learn and which factors can enhance or hamper their development. An important finding is that our brains are shaped by experience. The way we treat young children will determine how their brains function later on. Early experiences (beginning in the womb) can even determine which genes will be expressed and which will remain dormant. The implication of these research findings is that parents matter.

Traditional behavioral approaches, which use rewards or punishments, can produce obedient children who will passively accept the status quo. This approach may be appropriate for training factory workers. However, it will not enhance children's ability to find solutions for problems that they have not encountered before. We

need innovative thinkers to solve all the problems that are relatively new for human beings: How to cope with ten thousand families whose homes have been flooded? What to do with the plastic waste in the oceans? How to harness new forms of energy? How to prevent young people from joining terrorist groups? How to avoid widespread addiction to narcotic drugs? What can we do to end poverty?

We need a new approach for raising children. Our challenge as parents is to create a new generation of compassionate and competent people who will have the motivation, courage, creativity, and skills to find solutions for the problems facing humanity. It is time to question traditional ways of raising children and do something different. This book will help you understand your children, connect with them, and solve behavior problems without the use of either punishments or rewards. With your support, your children can develop their full potential for thinking, learning, coping with stress, problem solving, and relating lovingly to others. This approach will help them flourish, lead meaningful lives, and find ways to make the world a better place.

Parenting requires a tremendous amount of time, energy, attention, financial resources, and commitment. You may be struggling with economic hardship, isolation, and emotional or health problems. Perhaps you are a single parent with a full-time job and no free time. One way to make the job of parenting easier is to find help from others. You do not need to raise your children in isolation. If you cannot afford to pay someone, perhaps you can trade help with other parents. If you are tired or sick, ask a friend or neighbor to come over. Do not wait until you are totally exhausted. You owe it to yourself and your children to take good care of yourself and ask for the help you deserve.

As you travel through the early childhood years with your children, you will experience many emotions, both pleasant and painful. You will probably be reminded of incidents from your own childhood, and you may discover that a problem with your child resembles a difficulty you experienced at the same age. In fact, you will probably re-experience your entire childhood, whether

you want to or not! If you suffered from unaware parenting or abuse, your child's behavior will trigger your anger, perhaps more frequently than you expected. It is perfectly normal to feel irritated, impatient, angry, frightened, or totally baffled by your child's behavior. But these feelings will need an outlet so they do not interfere with your clear thinking and cause you to act in ways that you may later regret.

One of the most helpful things you can do for yourself (and your children) is to find someone who can listen to you and accept your feelings without judgment or advice. Take time to talk about all your daily upsets: the mud on the rug, night awakenings, sibling fights, bedtime struggles, and tantrums in the supermarket. You will also benefit by sharing your deeper feelings, doubts, and questions: Am I a good parent? Is my child normal? How can I meet my own needs? Will my child succeed in school? What can I do about my anger?

You will probably notice that your stress level decreases after you share your feelings with a supportive listener, and you may find it easier to become the kind of parent you want to be. Some parents benefit by exchanging listening time with their partner or a friend. However, if you are struggling with disturbing feelings of incompetence, depression, anxiety, powerlessness, or rage, you may benefit from professional therapy.

A set of exercises follows each of the chapters in this book. These consist of three sets of personal questions. The first set will help you explore your own childhood, the second encourages you to express your feelings about your child, and the third offers suggestions for ways to nurture yourself. You may choose to work through these exercises by thinking silently or writing in a journal. Another possibility is to answer the questions verbally with a supportive listener.

Don't forget to appreciate yourself for all the wonderful things you do for your children and all the love and attention you give them, even though you may feel inadequate at times. You are probably doing much more than you think!