

The Philosophy of Aware Parenting

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Aware Parenting is an attachment-based and trauma-informed approach to parenting which does not use either punishments or rewards. It questions most traditional assumptions about raising children and proposes a new approach that can significantly improve relationships within a family and prevent behavior problems. Parents who follow this approach raise children who are cooperative, compassionate, competent, nonviolent, and drug free.

Aware Parenting is based on the work of Aletha Solter, Ph.D., a Swiss American developmental psychologist, international speaker, consultant, and author of six books. She is recognized internationally as an expert on attachment, trauma, non-punitive discipline, and developmentally appropriate education.

The following three aspects and ten principles summarize the philosophy of the Aware Parenting approach.

The 3 aspects of Aware Parenting

Attachment-style parenting

- Natural childbirth and early bonding
- Plenty of physical contact
- Prolonged breast-feeding
- Prompt responsiveness to crying
- Sensitive attunement

Non-punitive discipline

- No punishments of any kind (including spanking, "time-out," and artificial "consequences")
- No rewards or bribes
- A search for underlying needs and feelings
- Anger management for parents
- Peaceful conflict resolution (family meetings, mediation, etc.)

Healing from stress and trauma

- Recognition of stress and trauma (including unmet needs) as primary causes of behavioral and emotional problems
- Emphasis on prevention of stress and trauma
- Recognition of the healing effects of play, laughter, and crying in the context of a loving parent/child relationship
- Respectful, empathic listening and acceptance of children's emotions

The 10 principles of Aware Parenting

1. Aware parents fill their children's needs for physical contact (holding, cuddling, etc.). They do not worry about "spoiling" their children.
2. Aware parents accept the entire range of emotions and listen non-judgmentally to children's expressions of feelings. They realize that they cannot prevent all sadness, anger, or frustration, and they do not attempt to stop children from releasing painful feelings through crying or raging.
3. Aware parents offer age-appropriate stimulation, and trust children to learn at their own rate and in their own way. They do not try to hurry children on to new stages of development.
4. Aware parents offer encouragement for learning new skills, but do not judge children's performance with either criticism or evaluative praise.
5. Aware parents spend time each day giving full attention to their children. During this special, quality time, they observe, listen, respond, and join in their children's play (if invited to do so), but they do not direct the children's activities.
6. Aware parents protect children from danger, but they do not attempt to prevent all of their children's mistakes, problems, or conflicts.
7. Aware parents encourage children to be autonomous problem-solvers and help only when needed. They do not solve their children's problems for them.
8. Aware parents set reasonable boundaries and limits, gently guide children towards acceptable behavior, and consider everyone's needs when solving conflicts. They do not control children with bribes, rewards, threats, or punishments of any kind.
9. Aware parents take care of themselves and are honest about their own needs and feelings. They do not sacrifice themselves to the point of becoming resentful.
10. Aware parents strive to be aware of the ways in which their own childhood pain interferes with their ability to be good parents, and they make conscious efforts to avoid passing on their own hurts to their children.

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For more information about Aware Parenting, please see Aletha Solter's books:

The Aware Baby

Cooperative and Connected (previous title: *Helping Young Children Flourish*)

Tears and Tantrums: What to do when babies and children cry

Raising Drug-Free Kids: 100 tips for parents

Attachment Play: How to solve children's behavior problems with play, laughter, and connection

Healing Your Traumatized Child: A Parent's Guide to Children's Natural Recovery Processes

Raising Joyful Lifelong Learners: How to Support Children's Natural Learning Processes