

Cultivating Emotional Maturity in Kids



A unique way to help children express and transcend their moods and feelings.

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Cultivating Emotional Maturity in Children

In my book, *Keepers of the Children: Native American Wisdom and Parenting*, I emphasize the idea that parenting is about guiding a child to grow into a *mature* adult. Think about this for a moment because it is an important concept.

During your lifetime, you have probably encountered many “adults” who looked like grown-ups, but didn’t act like them, especially when faced with stress. These are the *babies* of the adult world—those adults who pout, rant, blame, and shame their way through life. Whenever things don’t go their way, you can count on them to throw a tantrum. This is because their perspective is limited to themselves.

Emotional intelligence is essential to creating a fulfilling life because it is the hallmark of a mature adult. According to Daniel Goleman author of *Emotional Intelligence*, “Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others. It assists us to motivate ourselves and manage emotions well in our relationships. Our emotional quotient contributes to our ability to create trust, build productive relationships and demonstrate the resilience to perform under pressure.”

Now that you know what emotional intelligence *is*, let’s take a look at what it *isn’t* by examining a real life story. This will give you a glimpse of how essential emotional intelligence is to an adult’s ability to act maturely. In fact, this is how I have illustrated its importance to my boys.

A couple of years ago, my eldest son was in a little league playoff game. My husband, Larry, was the pitching coach for our team. (Unlike many little league coaches, my husband has a great deal of expertise in pitching and was recently inducted into the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame for leading his team to win the College World Series back in 1970.) On the other team was a coach whom we’ll call Fred who had his son (whom we’ll call Chase) on his team. When the game began, Chase was pitching. During the first inning, a boy on our team named Jessie came up to bat. Chase pitched the ball and Jessie, who was tall, but only seven-years old at the time, whacked the ball straight back at him. The ball hit Chase’s fingers and he began to cry. His mother ran to get some ice and after a few minutes of comfort from his parents, Chase recovered enough to finish off the inning.

Three innings later, the positions were reversed. This time Jesse was pitching and Chase was up to bat. Since this was an instructional league, my husband, Larry, stood behind Jessie on the mound to coach him as he pitched. When Jessie hurled the pitch, Chase turned and it struck him on the shoulder. He tore off his baseball helmet, threw it to the ground, stamped his feet and began to shriek. Fred, who was coaching third base, ran to Chase's aid. After he comforted him for a moment, he turned, pointed at Jessie and snarled, "That makes two!" Jessie flinched. My husband said, "Fred, it was an accident. No one was trying to hurt your son." Fred glared at my husband, clenched his fists and charged the mound. Fearing that Fred was going to slug him, Jessie shrank back against my husband and began to cry. The other coaches hurried toward the mound to prevent Fred from hitting Jessie or my husband. (My husband is handicapped and must wear leg braces and use a crutch to stand, so naturally the other coaches wanted to restrain Fred.)

While the other coaches held Fred back, he screamed obscenities at my husband and demanded that he get off the field. From my perspective in the stands, Fred's behavior seemed psychotic. Here was this fifty-something year old man—a *coach* and *role model*—whose blind rage was terrifying the kids. Even his son was crying.

Later, when discussing this incident with my boys (who were eight and six at the time), I said, "This is why we are teaching you to be mature, so you don't become a man like Fred." We talked more about Fred's behavior. I said, "A fifty-seven year old throwing a tantrum on a little league field—not a pretty picture, is it?" The boys solemnly agreed.

To underscore Fred's irrational behavior, we talked about the realities of little league baseball. Sometimes in baseball, kids get hurt. When a seven-year old is learning how to pitch, he's bound to hit someone, not because he intends to, but because he doesn't have control of the ball. As a coach, Fred should have known this, but instead, he chose to turn an accident into a conspiracy.

Let Fred serve as a reminder for us all. In order for children to grow into emotionally mature adults, they need practice, guidance and role models who show them how to act maturely in a variety of situations. Like everything in life, emotional intelligence is a skill that can be mastered but only with a firm and loving guide. Obviously, Fred did not have such a teacher. Unfortunately, it looks like Chase won't either.

The first step in teaching children to master their emotions is showing them compassion. Compassion is essential because it creates perspective. Had Fred had compassion for someone other than himself, he would have had no need to throw a tantrum.

Teaching Compassion

A parent models compassion by being compassionate. The word compassion comes from the Latin *compassio*, which means “to suffer with.” When you have compassion for someone, you empathize with what they are going through. All children need a compassionate witness to help them feel that they aren’t alone.

A simple example of compassion is when a child falls down and hurts herself and the mother holds the child and comforts her, saying something like: “Ooh ... that must have hurt.” Identifying the hurt confirms the child’s reality and comforts her in a time of need.

By contrast, there are some parents whose answer to a crying child is to brush her aside, saying things like, “That didn’t hurt” or “Don’t be a baby.” Although such parents believe that they are preparing their child for reality by toughening her up, they are denying the child’s feelings. When a parent denies a child’s reality, the child denies herself.

Since you can guarantee that your child will receive her ‘hard knocks’ from the world, she should be able to count on you for comfort which she will seldom get outside the home. When your child is ready, she will stop coming to you for every scrape and bruise because she will have learned through your example how to soothe herself. If you give your child compassion for the small scrapes of life, she will know that she can trust you with the bigger things.

Being compassionate starts with helping your child understand that there’s nothing wrong with having feelings. At one time or another, each of us has felt love, hate, jealousy, apathy, anger, rage, despair, etc. Having such feelings does not make us bad—it simply means we’re human. As Alan Harrington says in his book, *Psychopaths*, the difference between the saint and psychopath are not their thoughts, but what they *do* with them. Although a saint may occasionally entertain the murderous thoughts of a psychopath, what makes him different is that he doesn’t act on them because he sees a greater reality.

In the same way that we’ve all had similar thoughts and feelings, we also have a spectrum of moods: happiness, elation, hopelessness, despair, etc. While a mood refers to an atmosphere or tone, like a feeling, it is temporary. If we teach our children how to recognize and

transcend these states of mind, we show them how to make choices that arise from a bigger perspective. If we make our children feel bad about their moods, they will either identify with them or deny themselves the *experience of being a sentient human being*.

To feel compassion for your child, recall your childhood moods. For easy identification, it helps to make moods into characters. Follow along with me and I'll show you how to acknowledge and gently tease your children from the moods that do not serve them. The first step is to create some snapshots of common childhood moods. When you picture yourself as a child, what images come to mind?

When I picture myself, I see a blonde girl in a pink striped dress, white knee socks and black, patent leather shoes, giggling, twirling and glancing back, teasing, as she half runs, half dances across the lawn. I have a name for this girl ... I call her Glee.

Glee represents the freedom, joy and spontaneity of childhood. Hopefully, every parent has known her or her male equivalent. If you haven't known her or if you've known her only rarely, seeing children in the throes of Glee might make you feel anxious, angry or resentful. This is why certain adults have little tolerance for squeals of delight and wiggly, giggly behavior: they've denied their sense of Glee.

Although this might seem like a silly exercise, Glee is real – she exists physically and emotionally in a space in time. Her energy is palpable and transformative. You can see her in your child. Next time you see her, acknowledge her with a smile.

When you smile in recognition, you're identifying with and reflecting your child's experience of this feeling. The ability to mirror what another feels is another way we show compassion.

Although you might find Glee refreshing, there are many other characters that aren't nearly as charming or delightful. For instance, remember Patti Pout? If I close my eyes, I can see her clearly. Her drama-queen proclivities have tied her into a knot—her arms are crossed, her eyebrows drawn together and her lips pulled into a frown.

Patti Pout is pouting because she's not getting what she wants. Although she is blessed with many things, she's focused on the one thing that she can't have. Patti is angry because although she's whined and thrown a tantrum, her parents haven't given in this time.

Although Patti Pout might seem petty and self-entitled, she's a valid childhood character. Rather than making your child feel ashamed of acting out Patti's thoughts, you'll learn how to help her make the choices that will progressively disentangle her from Patti's clutches.

I could go on and on about the characters of my youth. There's Nancy Know-It-All and Debbie Defiant. There's Silly Susie, Lisa Liar, Fearful Fran and Evie Everybody-Hates-Me. There's Sandy Snitch, Jealous Jane and Just-Plain-Mean Maureen. There's Sticky-Fingers Sue, Tammy Two-Face and Kay Chameleon. Each character is real in the sense that she shows a certain face to the world and exhibits a particular behavior. Every character is unreal in the sense that she lacks dimension. She is a caricature, who plays a one-note mood, rather than a person with dimension. Each character is a facet of the human norms that your child can learn to recognize and transcend.

Although witnessing your child in the grips of Lisa Liar, Patti Pout or Tina Tantrum might seem tiresome, the experience can be made bearable by acknowledging that these moods are universal and if you approach them properly, they will eventually lose their power over your child.

With time and practice, children can begin to see that they are not their moods. You can teach them this, not in abstract way, but experientially—by helping them to identify the character of each mood as it presents itself, acts out its performance and exits the stage.

If you make your child feel bad for expressing a certain mood, there's a danger that she will identify with it permanently. We all know adults whose identity revolves primarily around a caricature like Mean Maureen or Nancy Know-It-All. Often, this identification begins in youth.

If you attach connotations to your child's moods, then she'll confuse herself with the label. Some parents tell their children that they're bad when they act out, while other parents make the distinction between bad behavior and the child.

It doesn't matter whether you make this distinction because a young child is unable to separate his concept of self from the label you assign. To a child, bad behavior is evidence that he is bad. If he continues to be identified as such, he will assume the label permanently. He will accept your estimation of him and *become* or *come to be* like the label you've attached. Remember that while a mature adult possesses moods, *a child is possessed by them*. This is a striking difference.

The key to helping kids rise above their moods is helping them express, recognize and let them go. Obviously, this requires a certain level of consciousness. Since children are in the process of becoming conscious, this is a skill that must be developed with your help.

What I'm suggesting is that rather than attaching labels to behavior, we can identify moods with love and humor by using character names. This identifies the mood at the child's level of comprehension and defines behavior in terms of action, rather than character. (In my book, character assassination is child abuse.) By doing so, you expose the mood for what it is: a flat caricature with limited choices. Each choice has a consequence. Show your child why a character's choices are not resourceful and you'll illustrate why choosing to rise above it is best for him and everyone involved.

For instance, when my eldest son, Dakotah, was four years old, he had a tendency to take on a depressive, everything-is-grim-and-gloomy mood. Since Dakotah was only four and I needed a way to show him how he was behaving at a level he could understand, I used the Winnie-the-Pooh character, Eeyore, as my translator.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with Eeyore, he is a depressive character who constantly expects the worst. Since he has expectations that he doesn't make known to others, he sets himself up for disappointment. To give you a mental image of Eeyore, I'll give you one used by his creator, A. A. Milne—Eeyore is the kind of character who opens an umbrella on a sunny day because even though there's not a cloud in the sky, he's expecting rain.

When Dakotah would sink into one of his Eeyore funks, I'd allow its full articulation. Sometimes that was all it took. If he continued on or tried to use the Eeyore mood to manipulate me for personal gain, I'd reflect his pout back at him and groan quietly in my best Eeyore voice, "It's a gloomy, doomy day." Sometimes, he'd glare at me and snap: "*Be quiet!*" (Few people like it when their unsavory mood is reflected back at them.) Although my recognition of his mood initially made him angry, I'd see the corners of his mouth twitch upward against the gravity of his frown. (This was an outward indication of the inner struggle between Dakotah and the Eeyore mood.)

When you use this technique, be careful with your tone. Like any tool, it can be used to enlighten or shame and punish. The tool is less important than *how* it is used. Since I believe that shame and punishment teach nothing but self-loathing, my primary objective is to *enlighten* my child—to lighten his mood, help him laugh at it and see that it doesn't serve him, so he can make

the choice to release its hold. First, however, you must allow the mood expression. This is difficult for parents who were not allowed to express their feelings as a child.

Think of it this way: when your child is stuck in a funk, his expression of this one-note mood is a sign that he needs your help. Emotions are complex and can often be baffling to adults. Imagine how confusing and overwhelming they are to children. Since your child lacks the insight and experience to wrestle with his moods, he needs your help.

Although it might not always be possible to deal with your child's moods as they arise, if you discuss the predominant traits of certain moods and give them a character name, in the future you will be able to elicit a response from your child simply by identifying the character by name. This is a shorthand method that can help your child develop instant recognition of his moods.

When Dakotah occasionally lapses into an Eeyore mood, I listen to what he has to say. If he's finished speaking, but shows me through body language that he is still captive of the mood, this is my signal that he needs my help. For instance, let's say my son is angry because I won't buy him a toy. His reaction to my refusal to grant his wish is to slip into an Eeyore funk. He whines that no one cares about him and says he *never* gets *anything* he wants. I listen to his complaint. When his expression doesn't return him to a state of balance, I'll say sincerely, "I see. Since I won't buy you that game, you believe that I don't care about you. Thank you for sharing your feelings." Then ever so gently, "Eeyore, I'd like to speak to Dakotah now. I know that *he* knows how much I love him and that I have his best interests at heart." Usually, this is enough. Although it might take him a couple of moments to choose to release the Eeyore mood, the flicker of recognition in his eyes tells me that I've reached the person behind the mood.

When using this technique, the idea is to acknowledge the mood by hearing it out and treating it with respect. Again, when you identify it, make sure to watch your tone. It's important to emphasize this because if your intention is to humiliate, then the technique will backfire. Don't expect your child to instantly transform from Eeyore into his naturally sweet, buoyant self. Give him time. Let him have his feelings, help him gain perspective and reclaim himself.

Although moods are like clouds in the sky, they don't always dissipate. The wind must gather enough energy to sweep the clouds away. If you short circuit the process by trying to force your child to feel differently than he feels (which is a quick way to make your child feel crazy), then although he might comply, you deny him the opportunity to learn how to make the choice himself. When you discipline your child in this way, he becomes dependent on you and

other authorities to coerce, shame, blame or punish him from his moods. Such a child will grow up to be an adult who is a victim of his feelings. Sadly, others will become victims of his great big feelings too.

Although a more compliant child will allow you to tell him how he should feel, a rebellious child will not. Such a child will cling stubbornly to his mood. The more you push him, the more he pushes back. Either way, *you* have created the problem.

If you push your child away when he's in a bad mood or try to force him to feel different than he does, you're abandoning him when he needs you most. Your job is not to be the mood police, but to teach your child how to recognize and transcend his moods.

Let me give you another illustration of this technique in action. One morning while I was working on this piece, I told my then five-year old son, Colt, to change his pants for school. When I looked at him, I could see that he was grumpy, so I asked him what was wrong. He drew his eyebrows into a line and snarled, "Nothing!" My calm reply: "Then change your pants and get ready for school."

In reaction, Colt flopped down to the floor and started taking short sips of air and making baby sounds. I let him express his feelings for a couple of minutes, then said, "Are you ready to put on clean pants now or do you need time in your room?"

At this point, a full-scale tantrum ensued. I led Colt to his bedroom and set him down on his bed. He crossed his arms and legs and insisted that it was too hard for him to take off his sweat pants.

I looked him in the eye and said in a no-nonsense, but compassionate tone, "Tell Tommy Tantrum that I want to speak to Colt." He glared at me and shouted, "You're making fun of me!"

"No, I'm not," I said. "I'm helping you to see that Tommy Tantrum has a hold on you. His words and actions have consequences. Are you going to let Tommy choose your consequences today?"

Although I saw that Colt was considering my question, I could also see that he refused to give up Tommy so easily. (The danger of Tommy Tantrum is that his defiance can make a child feel powerful, especially if adults give into him.) "Put your pants on," I repeated.

"I can't ... it's too hard," whined Colt.

I held Colt's gaze again. "You mean to tell me that my smart, five-year old boy, Colt, who can read and add three digit numbers can't figure out how to put his pants on?"

At this point, Colt broke into a smile. He couldn't help it. He could see the logic of my words and the ridiculousness of his behavior. The choice was his: he was in charge after all. He chose to rise above Tommy Tantrum. The change in his physical demeanor told me that Tommy Tantrum had exited the stage. It was obvious the moment he made the choice.

I glanced at Colt, as he was putting on a clean pair of pants. "Tommy Tantrum is pretty stubborn, isn't he?" Colt smiled at me and nodded. "But you're stronger than him because you can send him on his way."

Of my two children, Colt's moods have proven more challenging. People talk about the Terrible Twos as though it is a stage that starts and ends in childhood. But the Terrible Twos can last a lifetime. There's nothing more unattractive than a teenager or an adult who throws a tantrum when things don't go their way. Remember Coach Fred? An adult tantrum is not a pretty sight.

Although my children's moodiness has proved a challenge, in many ways, they have been my greatest teachers. They have taught me the power of love, creativity, understanding and compassion and the need to communicate with children at their level of comprehension. They have taught me that it's *my* job to guide them to exercise the power of free choice because until they have experienced what this feels like, it's much more compelling to sink into a mood. My kids have helped me see how setting limits and guiding them empowers them to own their strengths.

After years of working with my children in this way, I notice that they seem more mature than other kids. Sure, they occasionally act out, but they have a better understanding of their needs and feelings. Because their expressions are allowed, they will grow up with open hearts and unburdened minds. Rather than being captive of their feelings or using them as a weapon, they will use them as a guide. More important, as they learn to own their feelings, accept their humanity, be compassionate and playful with themselves, they will reach beyond their moods to the part of them that is eternal.

When you teach your child to make choices that empower him, he develops an internal locus of control. In a world jam-packed with external attractions and distractions, this is a powerful tool to give your child. As your child gains practice expressing, identifying and rising above his moods, he creates a well-worn path back to himself. As he grows, he will make the choices necessary to transform him into a mature adult.

The Practice of Patience

As a parent, you are the facilitator of your child's emotional education. If you reject his moods, then he will reject those aspects of himself. If you abandon him when he most needs you, then he will abandon himself. If his moods are inconvenient for you, then you'll learn the true meaning of inconvenience later when your child becomes a big, strong teenager, who has little self-reflection skills or emotional control.

In teaching our children how to rise above their moods, it's important to remember that we all wrestle with these feelings. Even as adults, we may find ourselves captive of sadness or bitterness and struggle to let it go. The more we practice, the easier it becomes. Understanding this, you can begin to see your child's moods as an *opportunity for you both to practice*. As you allow your child this opportunity, you transform yourself.

Using the current situation to teach your child how to disentangle himself from a mood, acknowledges the wisdom of using what arises in the moment. A child's outburst or tantrum invites us to take what seems to be a detour which the moment deems necessary for his growth. With time and practice, your child will learn to do this on his own. Eventually, other family members will facilitate this process.

This became obvious to me the day I watched my two-year old son help my four-year old from a funk. Although he wasn't exactly gentle, he was effective. On this day, my son Dakotah was "doing Eeyore" in the kitchen, while I cut vegetables for a stew. Colt, who was not quite two years old, cocked and his head and listened to his brother whine about how nobody loves him before suggesting: "Why don't ya just pick yourself up and frow yourself in da twash den, Eeyore," as he inclined his head toward the kitchen trash. His comment was so unexpected and so right on that we all burst out laughing, including Dakotah, who after a momentary pout, laughed the loudest and the longest. The keen observation of a two-year old had jolted him from his mood.

Don't be surprised if your children eventually help you with *your* moods. Although this hasn't happened much in my family, I know it will. Children return what we have given them. If you are gentle with your children when they are possessed by unpleasant moods, they will be gentle with your moods.

Although initially you might feel offended when your child makes light of your crankiness, see it as a testament to your skill as a parent. When your child is able to *enlighten* you, you'll smile because in addition to realizing that you have just been busted by a five-year old, you'll know that your child has learned his lessons well. Parents who are willing to face themselves in the mirror of their children's actions, have the greatest capacity to transform themselves.

Although rigid authorities will find your child's ability to point out adult moods disrespectful, don't let this deter you from teaching your child to recognize the truth. If your child publicly points out an adult's mood, take him aside and privately support his observations, but remind him how it feels when someone publicly points out his mood. Advise him that while it's okay to recognize another's mood, it's not wise to point it out because a certain level of trust, respect and intimacy is required before you can tease someone from their moods. (Depending on the child's age a discussion on the politics of power might be helpful, but this is a topic for another special report.)

Above all, allow your child's observations to give you pause. Since he's beginning to know himself, he naturally sees you and others. This is the birth of wisdom and an illustration of the startling mutuality of the parent-child/teacher-student relationship.

Tips for Helping Children Rise Above Their Moods

Below are pointers that will prove helpful when helping a child rise above a mood. First, be gentle. There are few people on this planet who like their moods held up before them. None of us like to be caught red-handed in the grips of a petty mood. Always, always be humane and gentle.

Teach in private. Take your child aside to talk about his mood. What is meant as a gentle observation can feel like public humiliation if done in front of friends, extended family or strangers. Although family members can often tease a sibling from her mood, if possible, it's best done one-on-one. Adding family members to the mix can sometimes cause a child to feel like everyone's ganging up on him. This can backfire and cause him to cling more stubbornly to his mood.

Let the mood express itself. Children have moods for a reason: feelings build up and need to have an outlet. Moods are like storm clouds. Some hover and rain a bit, while others appear

ominous, but simply pass away. Allow the mood to express itself. This might involve a look, an outburst or a stomping of the feet. If a parent allows the mood expression (rather than punishing it), it will dissipate.

Help your child identify his feelings before they become corrosive. When a child is not permitted to express his moods is when bottled anger explodes as rage.

If your child refuses to acknowledge the mood, leave it alone. If you trust what you see in him, then you have nothing to prove. If you have the need to shove a mirror in front of his face and force him to look at it, then you need to examine your motives.

The trick is to help your child see that his mood has *limited* behavior, *limited* choices, a *cartoonish affect* and specific *consequences*. Once he grasps this, he can make the choice to let it go. It is the *recognition* and the *choice* that follows it which empowers your child and makes it easier for him to make a similar choice in the future.

Refrain from rescuing your child from consequences of the caricature's behavior. If your child threw a fit and broke a vase, give him appropriate consequences. If you excuse violence, your child will grow up to be an adult who feels self-entitled about his anger. (Think Coach Fred.)

Although you must avoid overanalyzing your child's moods, it is important to reflect on the mood once it has passed. Ask your child how it felt to let Tommy Tantrum choose his consequences. Are Tommy's choices in his best interest? Ask him how he feels now that he's back in charge. By doing this, you teach your child self-reflection skills and underscore the lesson he has learned.

Children have varying degrees of difficulty in letting go of moods, depending upon their personality, sensitivity, the situation and how they're feeling at the moment. One technique I use with my children when identifying characters doesn't seem to work is to help them reconnect to what I call their "touchpoints." Touchpoints are physical points on your child's body: his heart, stomach and the soles of the feet or wherever you intuitively feel his sensitivity resides.

For instance, when I'm having difficulty reaching my youngest son, I'll invite him to play a little game. Even kids who are in bad moods will perk up a bit when a parent offers to play a game. The trick is not to ask, but to intrigue. If you ask your child a closed-end question, you give him an opportunity to turn you down. Rather than asking, smile and say, "We're going to play a little game." Start by squatting down to your child's level, so you can see him eye to eye.

This is what I do with my youngest son, Colt. I touch the area over his heart and say, “Let’s see who can take the deepest breath into their heart and let it go the longest.” As my son breathes, I breathe too, in order to encourage slow, deep breaths.

Depending upon how my child responds to my touch, I might keep my hand there and say, “Breathe through your nose, straight down through your heart and into my hand. Give me a big handful of your breath.”

Although this exercise isn’t about breathing loud, but deeply, it helps to reconnect the child to the part of him that is bigger than his mood. Watch to see if your child is breathing deeply and if not, ask him to take another heart breath. Say something like, “Your heart is huge. You’ll have to take a giant breath to fill it full of air. Okay, now let go—like you’re letting air out of a balloon.”

This is a game, so make it fun. Don’t mention Tommy Tantrum or any other character during this exercise. Otherwise, your child may hold tighter to his mood.

Now that your child has connected with his heart, he may have already expanded beyond the clutches of his mood. Regardless of whether he’s let go or not, teach him the entire exercise, so he’ll be able to do it on his own.

Next, have him breathe into his stomach. Put your hand there. Tell him that his stomach is empty and he needs to take a giant breath to fill it up. If his breathing is shallow, tease him. Say, “I know you have a giant tummy because I saw how much you ate the other day. C’mon, show me how you can fill that tummy, like a big balloon. Good. Now, squeeze all the air out.”

Your child should breathe from his diaphragm which functions like a bellows. When he breathes in, his abdomen should expand and when he breathes out, it should contract and flatten.

Next, touch the soles of your child’s feet. If you’re out in public, tell him to imagine that he’s breathing through his feet, past the floor into the center of the Earth. His breath fills up the center of the Earth.

At this point, your child has breathed into three touchpoints: heart, stomach and sole (or soul!). A physical change has occurred in him and most likely, he has returned to his radiant little self.

In addition to teaching your child how to reach beyond his moods, this reconnects him to himself, to you and grounds him fully in the present. (Of course, this exercise is not just for children. I encourage you to practice it yourself.)

After you've finished the exercise, squat to your child's eye level and ask him how he feels. Give him a hug. Tell him that you love him. Tell him that you are glad he's here and that you're lucky to have him for a child. Congratulate him for winning the mental wrestling match between himself and Tommy Tantrum.

About the Author:

Laura Ramirez is the author of *Keepers of the Children: Native American Wisdom and Parenting* (ISBN 0-9748661-0-5) which uses little known native concepts and teaching stories to show parents how to raise children who know their strengths and use them to create lives of meaning and contribution. By raising children to unfold the gifts within their hearts, parents more deeply touch their own. In this way, parenting is a process of *becoming* both for child and parent.

Although Laura is a white woman, she is married to a Pascua Yaqui Native American man (who was recently inducted into the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame for his career in baseball.) In raising her children to embrace the fullness of their multiracial heritage, Laura has created a way of parenting that is grounded in the physical world, yet spiritually based. *Keepers of the Children* is for parents, grandparents and child caretakers of any creed or color who are open to ideas that are effective and resourceful in raising kids who know their hearts and minds.

Laura has also written a companion to *Keepers of the Children* which is a downloadable Workbook/Journal that can be printed out on your computer and customized to your needs. The Workbook/Journal has exercises that help you make the unique ideas in her book part of your daily interactions with your child.

Laura is the owner of Kokopelli's Treasures (www.kokopellistreasures.com), a southwest lighting, home décor and specialty store, the author/publisher of Family Matters Parenting Magazine (www.parenting-child-development.com) and the author/webmaster of Love Quotes and Quotations (www.love-quotes-and-quotations.com) and www.walk-in-peace.com. She lives in the sage-dotted Nevada foothills with the loves of her life—her husband, Larry, and her two sons, Dakota and Colt.

To purchase a copy of *Keepers of the Children*, go to www.kokopellistreasures.com/keepers.html to pay by credit card or www.walk-in-peace.com/keepers.html to pay with Paypal. The book can also be ordered from your local bookstore or from www.amazon.com or www.barnesandnoble.com.

Please join Laura in her mission to help parents grow up a generation of children who know their hearts and share their strengths with others by purchasing and/or recommending the book to others. According to Laura, "Such children will grow up to become lights unto our world."

