



Raising Unselfish Children in a Self-Absorbed World

By Jill Rigby

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Child expert Jill Rigby reveals the dangers of the self-esteem parenting philosophy and offers an alternative approach that teaches children to respect both themselves and others.

After decades of experimenting with child-focused parenting, parents are beginning to realize that the result is often self-centered children who tend toward narcissism, selfishness, mediocrity, and dysfunction. Rigby espouses a new goal of parenting: gently bumping children off self-center and teaching them to be unselfish givers instead. *Raising Unselfish Children in a Self-Absorbed World* dares to revisit the values of compassion, forgiveness, thanksgiving, and unselfishness and insists that we can instill these values in our children.

With her encouraging approach, Rigby helps parents realize it's never too late to change their children's point of view and equip them to interact with kindness and respect in a world outside themselves. Teaching concepts, such as developing a passion for compassion, learning to give by forgiving, and filling every day with thanksgiving, *Raising Unselfish Children in a Self-Absorbed World* offers a new paradigm for parenting -- one that educates the heart and teaches moms and dads how to parent with a new end in mind.

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Editorial Review

Review

"I'm so tired of hearing parents on and off the air introducing their children by telling me, 'I have two "beautiful" children.' I always tell them that beautiful children don't change the world but 'good' children do. This book will teach parents how to nurture children into becoming decent, compassionate adults." Dr. Laura Schlessinger--international radio talk-show host; author of *The Proper Care and Feeding of Marriage*

About the Author

Jill Rigby is an accomplished speaker, columnist, television personality, family advocate, and founder of Manners of the Heart Community Fund, a nonprofit organization bringing a return of civility and respect to our society. Whether equipping parents to raise responsible children, encouraging the education of the heart, or training executives in effective communication skills, Jill's definition of manners remains the same—an attitude of the heart that is self-giving, not self-serving. She is the proud mother of twin sons who testify to her contagious passion.

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Introduction

I began the journey of understanding children twenty-five years ago when my identical twin sons were born. Those five-pound sacks of sugar filled our home and consumed my life in one glorious moment. Before their arrival our house was a comfortable, peaceful place for two adults working together to find their way through school, marriage, and life. After our children's birth our quiet home became a busy nursery. Two swings replaced an overstuffed chair in our tiny living room. Two, yes, two playpens lined the wall opposite the swings. Two high chairs filled the breakfast nook, leaving us just enough room to squeeze past the chairs on our way to the kitchen.

My daily ritual of rising early to see my husband off to work, dress, and then head out to conquer the world of interior design was radically changed. The cost of daycare for two trumped my salary. Our pocketbook and our hearts told us I needed to spend my days at home with our sons, a decision for which I have been forever grateful.

I traded in my business suits for jogging suits and replaced discussions of new sofas and fabrics with talk of potty training methods and changing "poopy" diapers. Despite the new challenges and odors, which could be downright disgusting, I loved being a mom. I found great dignity in changing those diapers. I now had a higher calling to give of myself in raising two little boys who would one day become men who would give of themselves to the world.

I was filled with more questions than I ever had in design school. Who could I turn to with answers to my parenting questions? My own mother, of course. She offered her experiential wisdom and then recommended I use my one-track mind to my advantage.

I set my one-track mind in motion and became focused on parenting. I read everything I could find -- from Dr. Spock to Dr. Dobson. From Penelope Leach to Terry Brazelton. I read deep psychological perspectives on the evolution of child-rearing in America and easy-to-read commonsense commentaries about raising "happy" children. If a book was in the parenting section, I pulled it down and devoured it.

What did I learn? Truth be told, after reading what the experts had to say, this first-time mom had more questions than answers. Should I put my babies on scheduled feedings, as my mother and grandmother had done, or should I feed them on demand, per the advice of current experts? One insisted that my sons needed to know the alphabet by the age of two, their addition tables by the age of three, and that they *had to* read by the age of four or they would never succeed in school. Another said that children need free play, and lots of it, to be prepared for socialization in school. It seemed the experts disagreed on every issue but one. There was a consensus that children need to feel good about themselves.

In many ways I bought into this philosophy. That is, I did until my sons entered kindergarten and I began to see the results. My attempts to reason with my five-year-olds created half-hour discussions that left me exhausted and my sons just as confused about what I had asked them to do as they had been thirty minutes earlier. When I allowed my sons to choose their menu for dinner, our mealtimes were often miserable because invariably they chose something we didn't have on hand, became upset, and then refused to eat anything else. I was trying my best to let my children decide what they wanted to do when they wanted to do it, as the experts had instructed, but I was beginning to think that maybe this instruction was nonsense. Then, when I read that I would damage my sons' self-esteem if I didn't applaud them with a "good boy" and a treat every fifteen minutes, I knew that what I'd been reading was ridiculous.

I wanted to raise sons who would become productive members of society, not puppy dogs who only did as they were told in order to receive a treat. I didn't want my children to expect special treatment or to be unable to function without applause. I didn't want them to grow up as greedy little monsters. I wanted to raise gentlemen who could put the needs of others ahead of their own wants. Anyone who's been through the "me, mine, and what's-yours-is-mine phase" of a two-year-old knows that all of us are born selfish. *I didn't want to feed my boys' innate selfishness; I wanted to get rid of it.*

I continued my study, although I narrowed my sources as the years passed. I threw out the philosophies that didn't work and kept only the ones that did. I read Scripture with new eyes, looking for the jewels that spoke directly to shaping and molding my sons to become the men God created them to be. I wanted to do my part without interfering with God's part.

As I've worked with children and parents over the last twenty years, I've become convinced that our overemphasis on self-esteem and happiness is the reason our society has become self-absorbed, self-conceited, and self-consumed.

In the following pages, we'll take a closer look at the evidence, and at how you can reverse this trend and empty your child's heart of self-centeredness and fill it with others-centeredness. I'm not going to give you easy answers. There are none. But contrary to the thinking of today, there *are* incorrect and correct answers. I'll do my best to give you correct answers.

Raising unselfish kids is difficult, but I assure you, it is possible, and the results are well worth it.

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Chapter 1

The Mirror or the Window?

Once upon a time a queen sat at her spinning wheel, gazing through a nearby window and thinking of her child to come. She imagined a daughter with ebony hair, rosy-red cheeks, and skin white as snow. Sadly, the

queen died after giving birth to a precious princess, who possessed all the qualities the queen had hoped for.

In time, the king took for himself another wife. She was beautiful, but she was also proud and arrogant, dismissive of her new daughter, and unable to bear the thought of anyone surpassing her in beauty.

Every morning the queen stood before her magic mirror and inquired, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who in this land is fairest of all?"

To this the mirror answered, "You, my queen, are fairest of all."

The queen was satisfied, for she trusted the mirror spoke the truth.

The sweet princess, who was called Snow White, grew up to become even more beautiful than the queen. One day when the queen queried her mirror. "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who in this land is fairest of all?" the mirror answered, "You, my queen, are fair; it is true, but Snow White is a thousand times fairer than you."

The queen was outraged; envy and pride grew like a weed in her heart until she had no peace day or night. The vain queen ordered a huntsman to take Snow White into the woods to be killed. But he had kindness and spared her life and warned her that she wouldn't be safe from the wicked queen unless she hid in the woods.

Deep in the woods Snow White found a small cottage that belonged to seven dwarfs, who welcomed her into their lives. She found contentment as a humble servant to her adoring dwarfs, until the wicked queen showed up and fed her the poisonous apple. But not to fear, a handsome prince rescued Snow White and they lived happily ever after. The queen? "She was forced to dance in red-hot shoes till she fell down dead."

I don't believe in fairy tales, but I do believe we can learn a lot about human nature from the retelling of familiar stories of old.

Why couldn't the vain queen be content to be a beautiful woman? What happened in her childhood that made her so desperate to be the most beautiful woman in the world? Why was the mirror her best friend? Why couldn't "enough" be enough?

The selfish queen had no empathy for a poor child who had lost her mother, and her cruelty forced her stepdaughter to flee the home she knew. The queen was so focused on herself that she couldn't see the child who desperately needed a mother's love. Choosing to cling to fleeting satisfaction that was here today and gone tomorrow, the queen denied an innocent child the love she deserved.

Just as the mirror magnified the queen's self-absorption, so it is with us. When we look at the world through a mirror, we view each event, every word and circumstance, as how they affect us. Our innate selfishness is magnified, and we give way to the part of our heart that desires to have it "my way," to the place of self-centeredness that wants to be worshiped and adored.

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12

Sad to say, many parents have led their children to the mirror by telling them through words and showing them in actions that "It's all about you." Of course, parents don't intend to send this damaging message, but in their desire to give their children what the experts say kids need -- high self-esteem -- parents often hand children a mirror as soon as they are born. In their desire to make their kids "happy," many parents smother their children with attention, lavish gifts for every A, and tell them they can be anything they want to be, do

anything they want to do, and have anything they want to have. Out of a desire to help their children feel good about themselves, parents often crown their kids as prince or princess of their domain.

But rather than growing up to be grateful, selfless, and thankful, these children are turning out to be ungrateful, greedy, and resentful, even toward their parents -- the very folks who have given them everything. And why not? Children who look at the world through a mirror see themselves and no one else -- yet they are never satisfied.

The Mirror One day a rich man of a miserly disposition visited a rabbi, who took him by the hand and led him to a window. "Look out there," he said. The ri...

Users Review

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