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AUTHENTIC  
PARENTING  
POWER

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Sandi Schwartz, M.A.Ed.

In collaboration with Melissa Schwartz



You are less powerful than you want to be and  
more powerful than you realize.



Understanding this paradox will transform your  
relationship with your children.

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Since English doesn't currently have a single word for such expressions as him and her, she and he, and his and hers - and since the repetition of both is cumbersome, while alternating between male and female is often awkward - I have chosen to use the plural to represent both sexes, as is becoming a trend in modern literature. As you read these pages you will find terms like "they," "them," and "theirs" used in reference to both male and female, for both singular and plural.

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# ACCOLADES

“What every child needs is to grow up feeling loved exactly as they are. When they do, they have self-worth and live in a healthier and happier body. Sandi’s book can coach you and help you to provide what your child needs to live a happy, healthy life.”

Bernie Siegel, MD

*Author of Love, Medicine and Miracles*

“This book provides answers to the question asked by millions of parents and grandparents: ‘Why do children act like this?’ Sandi takes you into the child’s inner world, uncovering the needs and feelings that fuel daily battles.”

Shefali Tsabary, PhD

*Author of The Conscious Parent and The Awakened Parent*

“Most parents’ hearts yearn for deep connections with their children but think discipline and deep connection can’t happen at the same time. Well, Sandi has done what seems to be the impossible. This book is a MUST read and needs to be in everyone’s parenting library.”

Kathryn Kvols

*Author of Redirecting Children's Behavior*

“Finally....a parenting book that recognizes and honors the spiritual bonds between parent and child!”

Litany Burns

*Author of Develop Your Psychic Abilities and The Sixth Sense of Children*



## DEDICATION

To the children who live with us and within us, and to the power of love as a life-force that connects our hearts and souls from one generation to the next.

To my family and friends, who continually challenge and support me in living what I teach. My perseverance comes from you believing in me.

And to our beloved grandchild, Ethan — May your life be filled with joy.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My heart is filled with appreciation for the people who encouraged me, kept me focused, and contributed to the birthing of this book.

To my co-author, my daughter, Melissa. Without you, this book would not have been written. Your voice is a constant presence on every page.

To my husband, Steven. You are the wind beneath my wings. Your quiet strength and open arms were my refuge on the days when I was inclined to give up.

To my son, Matthew. You took me by the hand many years ago and helped me create Leading Edge Parenting, LLC. You reminded me that I could still take care of hearts while taking care of business.

To my dear friend and honored colleague, Lainie Goldstein. I treasure your friendship and the weekly dinner meetings that lasted into closing hours. Our conversations inspired, clarified, and defined my message.

To my editor, David Robert Ord. Your gift and your genius allowed me to finally stop writing. I am forever grateful for your ability to transform 300 pages that needed much organization into a brilliant manuscript.

To the parents who have trusted me with their children, their personal stories, hopes, fears, challenges and triumphs. Together we are supporting each other to live a more conscious understanding of unconditional parental love.

To the children of the Universe — and we are all little children who have just woven bigger bodies around ourselves. I honor your determination and courage to live with joyful integrity.

And to Patti, my Angel.



## A NOTE FROM MELISSA

I didn't intend to be a collaborator for this book.

Hundreds of hours of soulful conversations with my mom about my upbringing, and what she could have done differently to diminish my childhood wounds naturally evolved into my role of co-creator.

My childhood wasn't perfect. I have plenty of wounds and scars that I've healed as an adult. Being born highly sensitive and intense seems to guarantee a path of self-reflection through adulthood. This is why I'm so passionate about supporting parents who have children hardwired like me.

What makes my mom an expert is not just her advanced degrees or years of experience. Her expertise comes from *living what she teaches*. I have always held a mirror up, pushing her to reflect, change and grow. Her expertise comes from her willingness to be open, keep her ego in check and admit when she's wrong.

She is the ultimate disciplinarian because she teaches through her own behavior. We cannot give to another what we do not embody.

How blessed I am to have a mom, and business partner who embodies and lives the wisdom shared in this book.



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“When we learn to use our power wisely we become an  
incredibly positive influence on our child’s development.”

— Sandi Schwartz



## INTRODUCTION

My work with families has shown me that even the most intelligent, successful, and aware adults struggle when it comes to parenting. The reason for this is that parenting involves the art of managing both our power and our powerlessness.

Each of us is less powerful than we want to be and more powerful than we realize. To accept this paradox is the key to transforming our relationship with our children.

There's so much we can do — and simultaneously so little we can do. The trick is to do what we can well. This we accomplish when we clear the way for the power inherent in our love to flow freely.

So why wouldn't love flow freely? After all, from the moment our children enter the world, every fiber of our parental nature pulses with a longing for them to be safe, happy, and successful.

We can compare parenting as humans to Mother Earth herself. Nature is simultaneously a source of vital sustenance and capable of great destruction. Consequently all of life exists on a knife-edge. For instance, simply by dropping showers from clouds blown in from the ocean, earth has the ability to nurture a seedling into a magnificent tree. Yet the same wind that bears on its wings life-giving moisture can become a whirling storm dumping torrential downpours able to uproot even a giant oak.

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In parenting, as in much of life, there's a fine line between caring and controlling. When we care, we draw out a child's inherent goodness; whereas when we control, we invite dysfunction.

It's widely believed that parents are supposed to control their children. Many of us were brought up to believe it's the parent's job to discipline their children to get them to fall in line. However, research into the effects of discipline, borne out by my extensive practical experience as a child development specialist, reveals that controlling children not only leads to frustration for the parents but is one of the primary causes of distress and misbehavior in children.

The problem is that whereas caring nurtures, control can wreak havoc with a child's sense of well-being. The repercussions of damaging a child's self-esteem then reverberate through every area of their lives, affecting not only the rest of the family but also the wider society in which they must function on a daily basis.

### **BEHAVIOR BEGINS WITH HOW A CHILD FEELS ABOUT THEMSELVES**

Although as a culture we've been deluged with information about how to bring up children, it's still not commonly recognized that *a child's behavior is an expression of how they feel about themselves*. We don't seem to realize that we can never raise emotionally healthy human beings if we damage their inherent sense of well-being.

If our children's lives are to be responsible, productive, and fulfilling, the desire for this has to come from a different source than our attempts at control. It has to flow out of a child's own center — out of *how they see themselves and feel about themselves*.

We so easily create a web of confusion for our children, entangling their innocent spirit, by insisting they see things from *our* viewpoint. Controlling them in this way, they lose touch with their own center — and herein lies the source of just about all the behavioral problems we encounter. It's hard to live a fantastic life when you feel anything but fantastic inside yourself.

Many parents have told me over the years that they have a right to raise their children as they see fit. This is why it's so common to hear a parent declare, "Don't tell me how to raise my child." I understand why parents feel this way: it's because they naturally assume they have their child's best interests more at heart than anyone else. However, because in many cases we are so invested in our children in terms of what they mean for our *own* sense of self-identity, the line between encouraging and controlling, nurturing and suffocating, and being openhearted and indulgent is so fine that we are ever prone to get it wrong.

Unhealthy expressions of parental power shows up as coercion, manipulation, and putting pressure on children. Equally harmful is the behavior of a parent who is disconnected, unaware, or too distracted to create structure or establish appropriate limits and boundaries within a framework of unconditional love. Both approaches are damaging. For effective parenting, the goal has to be a balance of freedom within sensible limits.

To state that control is detrimental to children doesn't mean we don't teach our children. Teaching a child is fundamentally different from controlling them. It's a parent's job to encourage habits of excellence. However, a child's brain doesn't develop positive patterns from parental yelling, threatening, punishing, or dismissing, which are actually expressions of control.

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On the contrary, the way we express our own emotions, handle family relationships and respond to daily challenges are what influence the way our children cope with life more than anything we tell them to do. When we model self-respect, integrity, and effective conflict resolution, our children learn from watching us.

The paradox of parenting power is that as soon as we give up needing to be in control and shift our focus to understanding our child's needs, answers to baffling situations begin to flow. Once we taste the freedom of letting go of what we can't ever truly control, we become open to the wisdom and intuition that gives us real power.

### **PARENTING IS A PARTNERSHIP**

Parents are pressured to produce children who are reflections of the social norms. Many parents imagine they are creating a nurturing environment because their children appear successful by society's standards. I argue that our greatness begins when we stop caring what others think and decide in our heart what type of parent we really want to be, together with the kind of home environment we want our children to grow up in. Creating the vision we want for our family may require challenging the status quo and facing resistance from people who are stuck in outmoded thinking.

Although we can't control the impact of peer pressure and the social media, what goes on inside the privacy of our homes ultimately has the greatest influence on our children's attitudes and behavior. Coming into our power as parents enables us to see that success in terms of our children involves how they feel on the inside rather than how they appear to the external world. An empowered parent is courageous enough to care less about what other people think, instead being concerned about what works for their child's

particular cosmic design.

When I speak of “cosmic design,” I think of this as the unique combination of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual hardwiring that constitutes each individual. It includes our essence, our genes, and the combined impact of our relationships, environment, and experiences — in other words, everything that gives us our distinctive makeup. Elsewhere, I refer to this as our particular “blueprint.”

Our children’s worthiness to live a life of inspiration in which they express themselves, appreciate each moment, and reach for their potential based on their specific cosmic design, is their birthright. Success is ultimately about living a life that’s fully alive. To support such a life, the parenting task isn’t to determine a child’s path for them, but to recognize that each of us is on an individual yet co-creative journey toward the full expression of our uniqueness.

It may come as a surprise to hear that you and your children are ideal partners for this journey. If you accept that you are here not to exert control but to learn from each other, you’ll discover that you can translate every challenge into an opportunity for the expansion of your true self — with the spinoff that your children also grow toward their potential.

When we decide to make a change in response to a situation that invites us to grow, our initial reaction may be resistance. I’m quite sure many will resist some of what I have to share. Be aware that doubt and fear often lurk behind our arguments against a course of action. I encourage you to be brave and unwavering in your intention to grow as you expand your understanding of the dynamics of the child-parent relationship.

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Change occurs when we reach tipping points. The tipping point in parenting is that magic “aha” moment when we suddenly understand what’s causing our child’s behavior and our reaction to it. Tipping points are powerful because they awaken our willingness to try something different. Each chapter of this book will give you information that has the potential to trigger an “aha” moment that can nudge you over your tipping point and into something extraordinary.

Parenting brings incredible joys and equal challenges, since we are no longer accountable for just ourselves. Taking on the responsibility of raising children awakens emotions that bring forth the best and worst in us. A child’s basic nature, emotional reactivity, unique spiritual journey, and connection to an ever-expanding universe are elements of a system so complex that it’s no wonder parents often feel baffled and overwhelmed.

I raised two very different children during an era when my family, friends, and the “experts” had opposing ideas about which style of parenting was preferable. On really challenging days, I wished for a crystal ball — guidance with magical clout. In this book, I decode the mysteries of the parent-child relationship. The magic offered is a synthesis of investigation in the field of child development, leveraging the power of thoroughly tested research that often contradicts popular opinion, and a growing awareness that our relationship with our children is a *reflection of our relationship with ourselves*.

### **LOVING OUR CHILDREN IS ONLY THE STARTING POINT**

When I ask my child development students why they want to be

teachers, the answer they overwhelmingly give is, “Because I love children.” I have no doubt this is true. But loving is only the beginning. Many people, young and old, love each other, yet they can’t get along.

Why did *you* choose to become a parent? What’s your vision for your family?

Most of us drift into the parenting experience without a definite sense of purpose. Remembering that love is just the beginning, your effectiveness is limited only by a willingness to expand your understanding of what parenting is really all about — and it *isn’t* about getting children to be “well behaved.” Love never involves controlling another human being.

For love to be effective, it can’t just be a feeling we have for our children. Rather, it has to be channeled in such a way that it supports the inherent state of well-being with which our children came into the world. Think of a hydroelectric power plant. When water spreads out across a plain, you can’t generate electricity. The water has to be channeled between the banks of a river. Well, love is like that. Before it can enable a child to blossom, it has to be harnessed and used with insight and wisdom.

Thinking we know what’s best for our kids just because we love them has led to generations of unhappy individuals, failed or mediocre relationships, and unfulfilled dreams — not to mention social and global turmoil. Even parents with the best of intentions unwittingly muddy the waters for their children to some degree. As a result, at any given time literally millions of adults are in some kind of counseling trying to sort themselves out. Statistics on the use of antidepressants, alcohol, and drugs for children age twelve and over

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are a staggering indictment of the condition of our collective emotional health.

While love involves feelings and often requires us to make certain decisions, fundamentally it's a state of being. Indeed, it's our most natural state — the way we behave when we are in touch with our center, our essence, our spirit or soul. The further we move from this bedrock state, the more disconnected from ourselves we feel. To be in touch with our unconditionally loving essence is the path to empowerment — and to empowering our children.

A willingness to discover what our children need from us to foster the development of their unique being is the first step to unlocking the real parenting power of love. When parents get caught up in their own agenda, they miss opportunities to help their children develop in their own special way.

It's essential to accept that we have no control over our children's unique cosmic design, which is hardwired and powered by their soul's purpose. It affects the way they perceive and respond to their surroundings. It generates the patterns of behavior that precipitate life's lessons. As parents, our greatest contribution is to provide a safe space in which our children can learn about themselves and flourish as the never-to-be-repeated individuals they inherently are.

While we can't control our children's unique hardwiring, we can nevertheless play a real role in shaping how each child's blueprint pans out in everyday reality. How children think about themselves, develop relationships, and perceive their world depends largely on the messages they receive from us as their parents.

The ability to lovingly guide children requires a combination of

our natural intuition, knowledge of the principles of child development, and being willing to look at the way our own beliefs and experiences unconsciously lead us to make typical parenting mistakes.

## **DON'T LOOK FOR QUICK FIXES**

Many parents want an easy fix for complicated issues. They want to know how to get their children to listen or how to stop them from displaying poor behavior. However, effective parenting isn't about a quick fix. This is because parental responses to children's behavior must meet short-term needs as well as long-term goals. For this reason parenting can never be about clever techniques and tricks designed to control a child. Instead, it begins with *connecting*.

Each child has a unique makeup with particular needs. The parent's task is to connect with the uniqueness of their children. Since what a child really needs is often so different from what we imagine — and different from those of our other children and other people's children — there can never be a manual for parenting. We are all too complicated to reduce our experiences to a singular operating system.

Understanding why a particular child behaves the way they do, and how our approach either encourages or shuts down their inherent state of well-being, is essential to bringing a child's best self forward.

As children move through the stages and challenges of human development, their unique makeup impacts their behavior. When we stop taking their actions personally and examine what they are triggering in our own inner world, we become empowered to

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respond in a manner that not only honors but capitalizes on their makeup. Having addressed the reason we react, we can now address their particular needs in a fitting way.

How this works in practice can be seen from Betsy, the mother of Julia, a stubborn and power-seeking eleven-year-old. Betsy had an “aha” moment when she realized that it was Julia’s hardwiring, not outright defiance of parental authority, that made it impossible for Julia to comply with many of Betsy’s demands. In order for Julia to feel more in control of her life, Betsy realized she had to allow Julia more choices for when she did her homework, what she ate for snacks, and her selection of clothes. Demanding that Julia listen to Betsy simply because “she’s the mom,” went against Julia’s need to feel empowered and more in control of her life. Betsy realized that Julia’s refusal to comply was a factor of her cosmic hardwiring exacerbated by a normal stage of development. Demanding that a child with this temperament be compliant is like requiring a table to turn itself into a chair. When Betsy allowed her daughter more choices, giving her opportunities to voice her opinions and affirming some of her suggestions, this stubborn tween became considerably more cooperative. This was a tipping point that drastically changed the energy between mother and daughter.

If we don’t know a child’s true needs — don’t understand how they perceive their world and how they develop — we can’t parent them in the way they require. We will misjudge what their behavior is really about and apply the wrong solution. This is why so many of our young people, especially when they reach their teens, prove to be a headache for parents.

When parents try to deal with power struggles without recognizing the way the human brain interprets messages, they are

missing a key component in understanding what drives children's behavior. Only with understanding can we leverage our power effectively, thereby helping our children grow up true to their blueprint.

Authentic empowerment begins with accepting our children exactly as they are, which requires giving up the need to mold them according to a prescribed formula and giving up the dream of what we wish they would be. We are embarrassed when our children don't share, are uncooperative, throw a tantrum, or behave irresponsibly. We are so hooked into the thought we might be judged, we have a knee-jerk reaction that entails making demands, threatening, or punishing, rather than patiently teaching our children the skills needed to act differently.

Powerful parenting involves detaching from our ideas of how a child *should* turn out, focusing instead on nurturing our children's gifts in ways that encourage authentic self-esteem. Character is built on appreciation for the expression of realistic gifts, coupled with determination to meet challenges. When we are oblivious to, or over-inflate, our children's victories, they develop a false sense of self.

## **“WELCOME, GENERATION OF LITTLE REBELS”**

Something is changing — can you sense it? Some say children are different than ever before. I agree: they are.

The latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have together ushered in an era when, unlike any other time in our species' long history, parents are challenged to keep up with their children. One of our main challenges is to wake up to a *more authentic way of being*.

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Some of the children who are being born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have more sophisticated wiring than past generations. Many of these little ones also have intuitive abilities beyond their parents' ability to comprehend. Some of them seem to be wise beyond their years.

Many of these kids refuse to be controlled by the kind of fear and guilt that ruled so many generations before them. They can sniff out inauthentic people and know when they are being manipulated. Refusing to comply with limiting and dysfunctional systems, they question anyone and challenge anything that needs changing. Young warriors, they push us to expand our consciousness in a way that shakes up our established systems. Hence it's both a blessing and a challenge to parent these children.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been a challenging time for parents and teachers because we are learning how to set up environments that respect and nourish this new kind of child. Slowly, we are moving away from thinking something's wrong because these children have unique styles of interacting and don't connect in conventional ways. We are being required to evaluate afresh just what is "normal," since behavior currently labeled as ADHD and Autistic may be the forerunners of new models of thriving. What we currently judge to be "special needs" might represent sophisticated talent.

As we are forced to adapt to these sensitive souls, we have an opportunity to ask questions that can lead to real change, such as: What kind of school environment works best for this child? How should we set up limits so they can follow the beat of their own inner drum and still thrive? How might the challenges of this child awaken something great within *us*?

I said that parenting is a partnership. The new ones coming in are insisting we take an honest look at ourselves. As adults, we don't always want to look at our own behavior — we prefer to focus on the kids. We know what we want them to do: we want them to be good, responsible, caring, empathic, and polite. Our message to them is “eat your food, do your homework, play nicely, and make me proud of you.” My message to you is to do your own inner work and watch the miracles unfold.

### **WHAT IS AUTHENTIC PARENTING?**

Authentic parenting isn't about raising children who comply with society's expectations and thereby make us look good. On the contrary, we pay a high price when we find it more compelling to brag about our child's ability to potty train early, make the team, or be accepted at a prestigious school than to wonder how they feel about themselves. Children who come to believe that all their parents care about are good grades, following rules, and making them proud often become teenagers who push back, hide the truth, and in some cases shut down, develop physical ailments, get into serious trouble, or take their own life. Control backfires as young adults refuse to be over-managed.

Children are aware that parents tend to care more about how they behave than how they feel, and this awareness is creating a new kind of generation gap. The generation gap used to mean changes in music, clothing, and hairstyles. Today we are experiencing technological advancement unprecedented in the history of our species. Our children are born technology ready, enthusiastically devouring ever-changing means of communicating and connecting.

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Less obvious and more confusing to parents are the energetic shifts also taking place. Our children are pushing us to look at ourselves and reevaluate many of the beliefs, values, and standards we have long regarded as unassailable “truths.” They are demanding, through their behavior, that we look in the mirror, then step out of the shadows of propriety and begin to be real. Consequently they don’t cave into authority as did previous generations. They are little rebels insisting we clean up our own act and grow along with them.

Our children realize we don’t like being challenged to be authentic role models for them. When they hold up a mirror to our inauthenticity, we tend to get angry with them. However, if we are willing to partner in the process with them, we will discover that being pushed to give up our own hypocrisy is a gift.

Increasingly, parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is more about raising the awareness of the parent than about the behavior of the child. The reason for this is that when we find our true power by giving up the antiquated and toxic beliefs about “making children behave” that haunted past generations, we change the energy with which we approach our children. The child then naturally behaves in a more cooperative, pleasant, and joyful manner.

How do I know it works this way? Because I have seen these miraculous changes take place in families and classrooms for the past forty years.

As we examine the parent-child relationship, it will be helpful to keep in mind that parents are just little kids who grew bigger bodies. Along the way, we accumulated networks of beliefs and patterns of behavior. So although as adults we occupy the parenting

role, we often operate from the mindset that influenced us when we were young. Unless we consciously uncover this conditioning from our childhood there will be times when our own emotional toddler, rather than our wise adult self, will be parenting our children.

Finding the courage to be an authentic parent requires becoming aware of when we are parenting from our own emotional immaturity. As I mentioned previously, such awareness may engender discomfort as we find ourselves having to jettison some of the beliefs about parenting instilled in us by our culture, family, or friends. We each move into our role as parent with a personal thermostat of comfort in the way we interact with our children. However, changing some of our patterns of thinking and behaving will create the shift that leads us into our authentic power.