

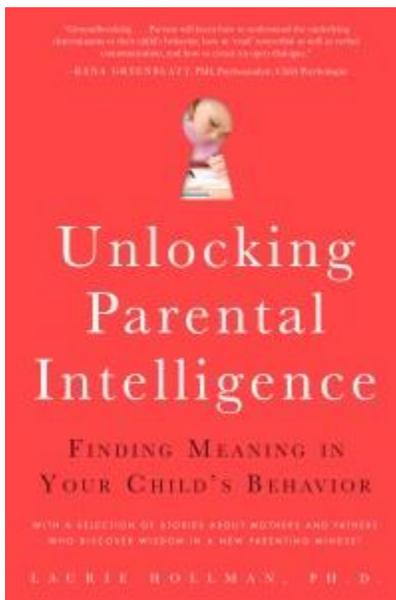
<http://www.brainchildmag.com/2015/10/excerpt-unlocking-parental-intelligence/>
October 18, 2015

BRAIN, CHILD

the magazine for thinking mothers

Excerpt: Unlocking Parental Intelligence

October 12, 2015



Introduction

By Dr. Laurie Hollman

Do you ever wonder *why* your child behaves the way she does? How many times in a single day do you ask yourself, “Why did she do that?” Even little things can throw you. Your three-year-old lies about brushing his teeth. He lied? At age *three*? Sometimes it’s subtle. For example, your teenage daughter tells you about her day, something she rarely does. Why now? Is she just feeling chatty or did something happen that she’s not quite ready to tell you yet? Sitting in a parent-teacher conference, or even a principal’s office, you may ask yourself, “Why did my child behave that way? How am I supposed to handle this?”

We’ve all experienced that awful feeling of fear, surprise, or incomprehension when our kids do something unusual, unimaginable, or outright distressing. And when nothing changes, despite our best efforts to address the behavior, all we can do is wonder, “Why?”

It’s common to have moments of despair, when you feel that parenting is beyond you; when you believe that the job requires a special kind of intelligence that wasn’t encrypted on your brain

and you're waiting for the time when you can sustain—for just one day—that important parent-child bond psychologists say is necessary for a healthy family life.

In this book, I am going to give you a new perspective on behaviors that may confound you and cause you powerful inner pressure or even panic. I'm going to lead you up a path that enlightens, uplifts, and relieves you as you learn how to unmask the meanings behind your child's behavior. As you continue to practice this process, you will become a *meaning-maker*, empowered to read your child's actions like an open book. Using the tools I provide, I will help you experience the heightened energy and deep satisfaction that come with unlocking your *Parental Intelligence*.

Parenting offers many humorous, precious situations—like the time you invited fifty people to your daughter's first birthday party and she pressed her chubby fingers into the center of the chocolate cake you baked, swirled them around, and then happily put them into your mouth like there was no distance between the two of you. If only it could stay that way; if only that instant could last forever, like a memento that reminds you of the cow that jumped over the moon. You hoped she could have a dreamy childhood and never stop believing that family life is all chocolate cake. We all wish it could stay simple—all good humor and pure joy.

But parenting can have a difficult side, too—like the time your eight-year-old fled the house yelling, "I'm running away! Why do you ruin everything? You never get it." He came back, exhausted after fifteen tortuous minutes speeding around the front yard like a freight train that had gone off its track and landed in a deep ditch. You stood by the window, watching him, heart pounding, worried and scared. You felt winded, as if *you* were the locomotive spinning off the track. Tears pushed out from your tired eyes. And your son came in defeated and spent. Even though he returned, you knew there was some deeper meaning behind what he did. But what do you do when you're afraid that whatever is wrong will shadow you and your child everywhere? The stakes are high.

The circumstances and backgrounds of the parents I've worked with as a psychoanalyst vary greatly—yet, I discovered that they had some crucial things in common. They were conscientious, thinking parents. And most importantly, they all wanted to understand their kids. This was key.

They were all searching for that special intelligence needed for respectful parenting, even if they didn't quite know how to ask for it. What they were searching for is what I call *Parental Intelligence*. I coined this term because I believe parenting requires the persistence and rigor of an intelligence that can be honed with the right tools and life experience.

I believe parents should never be underestimated—even when they doubt themselves. With a clearly designed pathway, you can unlock your Parental Intelligence, access and harness your parenting capacities, and solve the most important problems your children are facing.

With *Parental Intelligence*, you will figure out the *whys* behind your child's behavior. Knowing why your child behaves a certain way will allow you to find the best approach to dealing with the behavior. Understanding why your child acts out, disobeys, or behaves in disruptive and

disturbing ways is the key to preventing the recurrence of the behavior. Parental Intelligence provides that understanding.

I have narrowed down and systemized the learning process into five steps that will unlock your Parental Intelligence. And I will illustrate—through examples of many difficult scenarios of compelling family situations—how to use these positive parenting steps in order to achieve the outcomes you desire.

With *Parental Intelligence*, you enter the inner world of your child and understand where he or she is coming from. You will no longer focus initially on stopping misbehavior, but you will first try to understand the meaning behind the misbehavior, and even consider it a useful communication. This approach not only prevents undesired behavior more effectively, it also strengthens parent-child relationships. You and your child grow together.

Three basic interrelated tenets lie behind Parental Intelligence: (1) behaviors have underlying meanings; (2) once parents understand how their own minds are working, they are liberated to understand their child—how their child's mind is working; (3) once meanings are clear, options surface by which to change unwanted behaviors. When the three core concepts come into play, the ambiance of family life fundamentally changes.

This means that parents no longer focus on the child's specific misbehavior as the overarching troubles and problems emerge. When those problems are addressed, the original misbehavior loses importance and usually stops.

The book is divided into three parts. “Part One: Developing Your Parental Intelligence” describes the theory behind Parental Intelligence and the five steps toward creating it: *Stepping Back*, *Self-Reflecting*, *Understanding Your Child's Mind*, *Understanding Your Child's*

Development, and *Problem Solving*. The five steps are geared to parents who look to support their children's growth, and happiness. In today's society, there is a broad array of roles that mothers and fathers take on as they participate in parenting. These varied roles are readily adapted to family life as parents use their Parental Intelligence.

“Part Two: Stories of Parental Intelligence in Practice” offers eight short stories about parents using Parental Intelligence with their children. Each family portrait reveals that as parents understand themselves, they can better understand their children. With these understandings, misbehaviors become a catalyst to change. As open dialogue evolves, parents discover and clarify the meanings behind the behaviors. In turn, parents and children grapple with the underlying struggles that, though not apparent at first, were hidden behind the behaviors. Once brought to light, problems can be solved.

These stories about infants, children, and adolescents—including three with special needs: ADHD, a pervasive developmental disorder, and depression—demonstrate the broad spectrum to which the five steps of Parental Intelligence apply. The eight stories focus on the pivotal roles fathers and mothers can have in their child's behavior and development.

“Part Three: The Future with Parental Intelligence” describes a world where Parental Intelligence has become commonplace. This philosophy of parenting has ramifications at familial and societal levels. I discuss how this parenting approach provides a meeting ground where parents and children get to know each other in profound ways as they solve present

problems that affect their future values and directions. Children of such families will have the skills to work through conflicts in their daily lives and future relationships.

This book doesn’t have an ending. Many mothers and fathers raising their children with Parental Intelligence have told me that using these principles as a guide have led to a new way of being together—a new parenting life.

Chapter One

The New Parenting Mindset

The voices of empathetic parents become the inner voices of self-assured, secure children.

The major premise behind Parental Intelligence is that a child’s behavior or misbehavior has meaning—and often more than one. Once the treasure trove of meanings emerges, we realize that there are many possible reactions to misbehavior. If these ideas are new and even challenging to you, the following journey will take you to a positive and satisfying stage in your parenting life.

This important parenting mindset is founded on the belief that external behavior has internal causes. Parents and children alike behave based on what they think and feel. Using my approach, parents begin to learn how to hold in mind their own thoughts and feelings as well as their child’s thoughts and feelings simultaneously.

Let’s fast forward to two of the parents and children you will meet in this book: Clive and his father, and Olivia and her mother. Let’s assume that Clive’s father and Olivia’s mother have completed this book and have acquired a secure parenting mindset.

One morning, when Clive’s father told him to put on his shoes to get ready for school, the six-year-old threw them across the room. Clive’s father learned a great deal about parenting by following a series of steps about effective parenting (which will soon become apparent as we get to know him later). Therefore, he was able to experience Clive’s impulsive reaction and his own annoyance with Clive’s behavior simultaneously. He learned that holding both his and Clive’s feelings in mind was a requisite for understanding what may be going on when they are working at cross purposes.

He wanted Clive to get ready for school, but he didn’t know yet that Clive didn’t even want to go to school, something that had never happened before. Clive’s father knew he had to look for meaning behind his son’s behavior. He understood that if he jumped in and insisted that Clive put the shoes on immediately, he might miss an important opportunity at real and true

communication. He held back from giving an immediate consequence to Clive's action. He held his breath and forced himself to wait for Clive to calm down.

Because he and Clive had worked on this approach for months, Clive's father was able to ask Clive if something was upsetting him about putting on his shoes to get ready for school. Eventually, Clive was able to explain what was bothering him. Clive told his dad that during an arithmetic lesson in his kindergarten class, he gave a wrong answer to a simple addition problem and a classmate laughed. In response, Clive poked the boy with the eraser end of his pencil. The boy cried out and the teacher, who is generally quite sensitive to kindhearted Clive, took a most unusual but spontaneous action—she yelled at him. Clive didn't know that was the reason he threw the shoes, but his father was able to make the connection in his mind.

The father's awareness that his child's impulsive behavior must have a reason enabled him to take a step back and create space for Clive to explain what happened at school the day before. The parenting mindset that asks the parent to hold both himself and his child in mind creates a sense of safety for both child and parent. An atmosphere of safety allows children to communicate feelings and events that are most distressing, exciting, and important to them without embarrassment or self-consciousness. Using Parental Intelligence, misbehavior becomes a catalyst for communication.

On the way to the kitchen, thirteen-year-old Olivia said to her mother, who was not yet in sight, "Mommy, I have something to tell you, but I don't want you to be mad." Implementing the principles of Parental Intelligence, her mother immediately adopted the nonjudgmental, empathic mindset needed to help Olivia feel safe enough to talk to her. "Whatever it is," her mother said, "we can work it out."

Olivia, head down, walked into the kitchen where she raised her face to show her mother a golden ring piercing her lower lip. Her mother was shocked, but she worked hard at reserving her feelings, holding Olivia's worry in mind as well. It was important to Olivia's mother that Olivia could tell her about this without fearing her reaction. Olivia started to cry and explained that her best friend convinced her to go to the mall where they each got a lip ring. At first, they thought it would be fun to have a new look, but as soon as it was done, they knew it was a big mistake.

"How big a mistake could this be?" Olivia's mother asked. "If you don't want to leave it in, take it out, and the hole will close up in a few days."

Even though Olivia already knew this, her mother's response allowed her to experience her mother as a safe parent, someone she could approach with her problems. She and her mother discussed as openly as they could why Olivia experimented with the lip piercing, learning together that there may be several reasons. Olivia wanted to feel prettier: her self-image was uncertain, and she wanted to experiment with a new look that she thought was more mature. She also wanted to do something independently from her mother. The conversation with her

mother allowed her to feel her mother's acceptance, which, in turn, supported her attempt at independence, even though it didn't turn out well. Keeping her shock to herself, Olivia's mother reaped tremendous rewards. She learned much more about Olivia than she had imagined was

possible, and she suffered along with her daughter as Olivia poured out her lack of confidence and desire to be independent.

Olivia's mother knew that keeping both herself and her daughter in mind would provide the safe environment her daughter needed to truthfully explain what had happened. This led to greater understanding, not only of this experience, but also of their relationship as a whole. The sense of safety between Olivia and her mother didn't come with this one incident, but with hundreds of such encounters in everyday life.

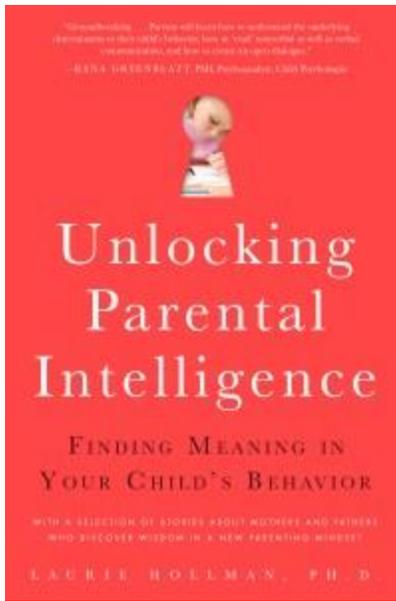
These examples show that a parent is not only responding to physical, but also to psychological reality. Throwing the shoes or getting the lip ring constituted physical reality. Clive's desire to be liked by his teacher, to be a good child, to not be embarrassed at school, and for his father to take his side constituted Clive's psychological reality. Olivia's psychological reality included her fear of making her mother angry, her worry over her self-image, and her wish to do something independently.

This parenting mindset can and will affect your daily life and give you and your child a greater sense of well-being. Olivia and her mother felt safe and comfortable enough to be discussing Olivia's problems. This reinforced their relationship, giving them a feeling of strength and comfort within themselves and a feeling of being grounded and secure. Olivia's mother's self-image as an effective parent grew, and Olivia's self-image as a daughter who can safely experiment and trust her mother despite a mistake was affirmed. Clive and his father felt a strong connection because Clive's empathic father recognized and understood Clive's conflicts. Both children felt accepted by their parents as they worked out their troubles together.

Parental Intelligence allows a hopeful outlook. You are ready to learn the steps that are necessary to evolve as effective and loving parents who listen to their children through words and actions. This orientation, once established, stays inside of you.

[Read *Brain, Child's* exclusive interview with author Dr. Laurie Hollman](#)

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