

1. Laurie, what was the inspiration, the driving force, behind the writing of *Unlocking Parental Intelligence*?

It's hard to write in the past tense about my "inspiration" for writing about Parental Intelligence even though the book is finished and published because I continue to write about the concept. My inspiration has had and continues to have many sources for which I am grateful—the children and parents I treat in my clinical practice and my own children. I'm fortunate to be able to keep on writing about Parental Intelligence for *Huffington Post*, so I can reach more and more parents and receive their feedback and questions. I'm *still* inspired!

As my three decades of psychoanalytic practice and research progressed, I incorporated the voices of so many mothers and fathers who came at different stages in parenting. Feeling thankful to those parents for telling me how unlocking their Parental Intelligence benefited their families, I was compelled to narrow Parental Intelligence into five accessible steps for others to grow from.

My children were raised with Parental Intelligence. It was natural for me to want to understand their minds—their thoughts, feelings, intentions, and imaginings. It's wonderful to share trust and love with your children. I hadn't coined the term, Parental Intelligence, when I was a young mother, but I was practicing it nonetheless and wanted others to have the same good fortune to have empathic, industrious kids with great senses of humor who enjoy learning, creating, and relating well with others. They have been and surely are an inspiration for my writing.

2. What were your biggest challenges in writing the book?

I love words! I revel in finding the right word to express what I'm feeling and thinking. I remember working hard on *Part I: Developing Your Parental Intelligence* to develop five accessible steps for parents to gain Parental Intelligence:

- Stepping Back
- Self-Reflecting
- Understanding Your Child's Mind
- Understanding Your Child's Development
- Problem Solving.

With each step, I wanted to be talking *with* my readers through my writing.

Once the five steps were in place, one of the favorite but difficult parts of writing this book became writing *Part II: Stories of Parental Intelligence in Practice*. Writing short stories was new for me. I wrote about

- fussy behavior in a baby
- a two-year-old's temper tantrums,
- jealousy in an identical twin who hit his brother
- a child with ADHD
- a thirteen-year-old with an anxious mother
- a fifteen-year-old depressed teen
- a lonely, though brilliant, seventeen year old.

I began to live with my characters. I remember finishing a chapter about a little boy who drew a picture that led his father to finally understand what he was going through. I was drained—I felt so much for this boy who felt he was a “*bad, bad*” child when he was so sensitive and wonderful.

I wanted my readers to really get to know the parents and children I was writing about and to care about them. I wanted to bring my readers into the lives of these people, to identify with them, and then naturally learn Parental Intelligence rather than feel like it was an intellectual exercise.

I hope my readers find themselves interrupting their reading to rest the book on their laps just to muse about the characters and let their minds wander into their own lives with their children. In that way, I hope they get to know themselves and their children better—loving them even more.

Writing became relaxing for me. I guess I would “get into the zone.” This experience led me to write to parents through *Moms Magazine* and *Huffington Post*. It was a shift from writing scholarly works for psychoanalytic journals and books to writing for the popular press, but I find it challenging and exciting. The book gave me the opportunity to write about what I knew very well and felt very deeply and now I can continue to do that.

(Here's a recent link to a *Huffington Post* article: “[Can We Change How We Parent? Unlocking Parental Intelligence](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/laurie-hollman-phd/can-we-change-how-we-pare_b_8125404.html)”) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/laurie-hollman-phd/can-we-change-how-we-pare\\_b\\_8125404.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/laurie-hollman-phd/can-we-change-how-we-pare_b_8125404.html)

3. You make an interesting turn on the word "unlocking" in the book's title. What was your purpose there?

I think parents should never be underestimated even when they have self-doubts. When I first have a consultation with distressed parents and ask them questions, they are surprised how much they know about their child. As a psychoanalyst and writer I want to help parents organize what they know and harness this knowledge with the use of Parental Intelligence. In this way, I “unlock” what they know and help them use it in ways they haven't before. The five steps take the parents on a journey where they unlock their Parental Intelligence and get to know the underlying problems behind their child's behavior. The behavior is really sending messages. The key is to understand and decipher those messages.

By unlocking Parental Intelligence parents learn how to understand why children do what they do, what is on their minds, and how they can comprehend their child's inner world. The behavior is the catalyst to change as words rather than behavior become the vehicle for improved communication and connections between parent and child.

Just today a patient told me about intending to buy three copies of my book—one for her daughter who just had a baby, one for her daughter-in-law with her six-year-old grandson, and one for herself. She said to me that her favorite word now is “unlocking” because these ideas have helped her to unlock all the resources from inside her to live a fulfilling life.

4. What distinguishes your approach from other approaches to parent-child conflict resolution?

My approach is distinguished by my intent to help parents become “meaning makers.” 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 puzzling behaviors.

When these three core concepts come into play and parents are faced with misbehavior, first they ask, “What does it mean?” not “What do I do?” With this in mind, the ambiance of family life fundamentally changes.

When parents get to know themselves—their reactions to their child and the many influences on their parenting—they find that they gain a better understanding of their child who wants to be known as he or she actually is. 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. Parents learn how to understand the underlying determinants to their child's behavior, how to ‘read’ nonverbal as well as verbal communication, and how to create an open dialogue.

4. You write about politics and parenting. That's interesting; tell us about that.

My epithet for the last chapter is: “*When children's voices are heard, leaders are born.*” My younger son contributed to *Part III: The Future with Parental Intelligence* with his millennial voice. I'll let him speak for himself:

*“America seems to be in a period of political dogma, a place where certitude is more important than nuance and understanding.” This certainty “is masqueraded as strength, but it really comes out of ignorance and fear. I think you can argue that parents fighting with a child, letting their ego get involved, are doing so out of fear of the unknown, unconsciously using a survival reflex, defending themselves unnecessarily. The only thing that can combat fear is knowledge: knowing there’s a technique to deal with understanding what’s happening in someone else’s mind. And that technique is Parental Intelligence. If Parental Intelligence were taught, if people were encouraged to understand one another before reflexively trying to defend themselves, if trying to empathize and know others’ minds was seen as a strength, we’d live in a more compassionate, if not more efficient, society.”*

5. When a parent reads *Unlocking Parental Intelligence*, what do you hope is their single most important take-away?

I want parents to think of themselves as “meaning makers.” That leads to the following:

1. Parents take away a *new style of parenting life* that sustains them through happy and distressing times through all stages of child development.
2. Behaviors or actions are understood as requests for communication and understanding when words can’t be found or don’t suffice.
3. With this focus, the overarching meanings behind child behavior will be unmasked leading to effective problem solving and deep, sustained parent-child bonds.
4. In addition, I want parents to be inspired by up-to-date research:
  - how stress is transmitted from the intrauterine environment to the infant
  - how babies’ bodies’ mime adult language
  - how children with Asperger Syndrome communicate
  - how parents decide whether to choose what I call “the new wave of scheduled socialization” for elementary school age children
  - how current research describes the impact of fathers’ involvement on their children.

By the end of the book, if not before, I’d like parents to take away the set of tools needed to help understand their children’s behavior and in turn become more effective parents. Parenting will feel more pleasurable, inspiring, and gratifying. Their children will be grateful, thinking, capable, and loving.

