

[PDF] Chicken Soup For The Soul: Children With Special Needs: Stories Of Love And Understanding For Those Who Care For Children With Disabilities

Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Heather McNamara - pdf download free book

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Description:

About the Author Jack Canfield is a co-founder of Chicken Soup for the Soul.

Mark Victor Hansen is a co-founder of Chicken Soup for the Soul.

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The Voice of Reason Wears SpongeBob Underpants

In the book of life, the answers are not in the back.
Charlie Brown

'Oh, my child will never behave like that in public,' I remember smugly telling a friend over lunch one day. 'I simply won't allow it.' Seven months pregnant with my first baby, I watched in horror as a preschool-aged girl screamed, kicked, and flailed while her humiliated mother tried to drag her away from the play area and out the door.

'I tell you, I'll never let a three-year-old run my life!' I smirked as we got back to our discussion of nursery themes.

Looking back, I seemed to have all the answers regarding child rearing before I ever had one of my own: when and what they should eat, the proper cartoons to watch, which toys they should be playing with, the best way to potty-train. If it concerned children, this expectant mother had an opinion about all the 'right' ways to do things, and shame on anyone who disagreed!

So sure was I that badly behaved children were the direct result of bad parenting that nothing short of a whack over the head could have convinced me otherwise. And, as karma would have it, that whack occurred late one night in June 2003 in the form of a four-pound, nine-ounce screeching baby boy.

Difficult from the beginning, little Antoine was determined to put our fledgling parenting skills to the test. I was committed to nursing him, but he refused to latch on. Gastrointestinal problems meant that the milk I spent so much time pumping almost always came back up. He screamed, sometimes for hours on end, for no apparent reason. He stared, not at us, but at a bright light on the ceiling. And the child never ever slept, which meant, of course, that neither did we.

As time went on, his behavior became even more challenging, and sometime around his first birthday we stopped taking him to public places altogether unless we simply had no other choice. His unpredictability and his 'nuclear meltdowns' in the supermarket, for example, more often than not had me terrified that one of my fellow shoppers would summon the police.

Gone were the days of enjoying restaurant meals as a family, as even a fast-food experience with Antoine was likely to deteriorate into a chaotic scene. In fact, a trip outside our home for any reason typically meant enduring finger-pointing, cold stares, and rude comments from perfect strangers as Antoine, oblivious to his surroundings, carried on as though he were being prodded with hot poker.

'Can't you control your child?' 'Ma'am, if he doesn't quiet down, I'm going to have to ask you to leave,' 'Spoiled brat,' or 'Give him to me for a few days, I'll straighten him out!' came my way so often that I began to categorize my days by the number of insults I received from people who knew absolutely nothing about me or my child.

Worst of all was the 'advice' we received from friends and family whenever we attempted to voice

our concerns that something wasn't quite right with our little boy. Some tried to reassure us, claiming that perhaps the 'terrible twos' had set in a bit early, that tantrums were normal, and that he'd settle down once he got older. 'He's just all boy,' some said. Others gently pointed out that he would behave better if we could simply learn to show him 'who's boss,' while still others were competitive: 'Oh, you think he's bad, you should see my Brian.'

How on Earth could we possibly explain what it was like to live with this whirling dervish, this Tasmanian devil of a boy to people who clearly thought that children came in a one-size-fits-all model? And who was to say that they weren't right? As first-time parents, what did we know? After all, no one had ever told us that raising kids was easy.

What we did know was that the level of stress in our household (already at an incomprehensible high from trying to meet the day-to-day needs of a child who alternated between ramming his head into the armoire and spending hours at a time lining his toy cars into neat little rows) was made even higher by the large amount of seemingly thoughtless commentary we received, no matter which way we turned. Indeed, it was commentary of the very type I had made myself once upon a time.

When Antoine's diagnosis of autism was eventually confirmed, we—like most parents confronted with the disorder—were devastated. At the same time, the sense of relief was profound. Knowing that there was a reason behind our child's erratic behavior and that we weren't crazy after all gave us the strength to go on when it seemed like our whole world was falling apart.

These days, Antoine has more good days than bad. At three and a half, he is the light of my life and has taught me more about myself than I could have imagined possible. He still does not make transitions well, and, though fewer and farther between, his meltdowns can still be considered 'nuclear' by anyone's standards. That much has not changed.

What has changed is my own ability to empathize, to put myself into the shoes of another. Never again will I be so quick to make judgments. These days, thanks to knowing and loving my amazing little boy, if I say anything at all, it is this: How can I help?

Shari Youngblood

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