

Introduction

I can't say that my childhood was happy. My parents were always fighting with each other and screaming at us kids. I remember being young and just wanting someone to care about me and show me some attention and love. When I found out I was pregnant, I made a promise to raise my baby different. I want her to grow up without the hurt and anger that I carried around with me. The problem is that being a parent is harder than I thought and I don't always know what to do.

Charlene, 16 years old

Who Is This Book For?

This book is written for any teenager or young person who is trying to raise a child the best way he or she can. And as you probably already know, that's a huge job. Being a parent isn't easy. In fact, ask most people and they'll tell you that it's the hardest job there is. But it can be even tougher if you are young, a single parent, struggling to find a decent job, still trying to finish school, or feel stuck in an unhealthy relationship.

Parenting can also be a big challenge if you've grown up around parents or caregivers who hurt you physically or emotionally, neglected you, or acted in other ways that caused you pain. If this happened to you, it may be hard to figure out how to be an effective parent. For the most part, we learn what we see. Even if we *want* to parent without yelling or hitting, sometimes it helps to be *shown* another way. That's where this book comes in—by answering some of those big questions and giving you some ideas about how to be a truly effective parent.

To learn more about the issues facing young parents, I asked a group of young moms and dads to meet with me every week for three months. The stories you'll read in this book are from journals they kept describing their experiences as young parents. As we spent time together, I noticed that one question kept coming up. It was, "How do I give my child something I never had?" What was the "something" they were talking about? For some girls it was love, acceptance, and support. For others it was guidance and healthy discipline. For a few it was having a mother who could keep her children safe and protected. Basically, what the mothers in our group all wanted to know was, How do I raise my child so that he or she doesn't feel the fear, disappointment, or pain that I did? And that's what this book is all about. Or maybe you had a pretty easy childhood, but find yourself with a lot of questions about how to raise your own child. This book is for you, too.

This book is also about helping you grow as a person, while finding those things already within you that will make you a nurturing, strong, and wise parent. Maybe you didn't plan on becoming a parent so young. Or maybe you wanted a child, but didn't know quite how hard it would be. No matter how you got here, learning to be an effective parent is your supreme task. It's your mission.

What's All This "Effective Parent" Stuff?

In this book we've decided to use the word effective parent instead of good parent. Why? Because sometimes people confuse being a "good parent" with being a "good person." You're all good people. But parenting is like any other skill. You have to learn it to do it well. Parenting doesn't always come naturally. And it's not like babies come with instruction manuals.

So how do we learn to become effective parents? We learn by watching other effective parents. We learn by reading books, through a visiting nurse, or by going to parenting classes. Unfortunately, there's not always someone around to show us the ropes—that's what this book is for.

The most important reason to become an effective parent is because it will save you a lot of headaches and heartaches. Effective parents usually have kids who are easier to manage, have fewer behavior problems at home and school, and end up getting involved in fewer high-risk behaviors (like drugs, crime, and violence). Now, this isn't to say that if your child is having behavior difficulties, it's all your fault and that you're a bad parent. But making a few changes in your parenting can really improve your child's behavior and give you greater peace of mind.

(And in case you're wondering, I have three little kids myself, so I know how tough parenting can be. Hopefully I can share some of what I've learned as a psychologist and a mother to make your job a little easier. Also, I work with a lot of other great people who've helped me write this book. We might not have all the answers, but we've got a lot of them!)

Power Source

Before *Power Source Parenting*, we wrote a book called *Power Source: Taking Charge of Your Life*. It's filled with stories written by young people who have gotten involved in high-risk behavior. Many come from families where there are problems like domestic violence, substance abuse, neglect, or a parent in prison. But the one thing they have in common is the desire for a better, happier life. If you haven't read *Power Source*, we encourage you to ask a counselor or teacher to contact the Lionheart Foundation to receive a copy. Thousands of kids across the country have read *Power Source* and love it. Many say it's the first book they've read that's real and has anything to do with their lives. *Power Source* puts you on the road to handling some of life's most difficult challenges, like dealing with anger or abuse. It gives you the tools to take control of your life so you don't give your power away over and over. But most importantly, *Power Source* helps you discover who you really are and the kind of future you want to have.