

# BUILDING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

*Practices to Cultivate  
Inner Resilience  
in Children*

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*Introduction and Audio Practices Narrated by*

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# Introduction

BY DANIEL GOLEMAN

**R**ecently I spoke with a mother about how her daughter was doing in school. “Well,” she said, “she’s good at math, better at English—but even better at emotional intelligence.”

That was a conversation that could not have occurred just a while ago. It was 1993 when Linda Lantieri and I, along with a small group of like-minded colleagues, got together to establish the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Back then there were but a handful of programs that exemplified the best promise of “social emotional learning” (SEL), the systematic classroom teaching of emotional intelligence. These programs add to the regular school day a curriculum for handling life: improving self-awareness and confidence, managing disturbing emotions and impulses, increasing empathy and cooperation.

Linda was at the helm of one of those programs, Resolving Conflict Creatively, which had already found its way into hundreds of schools as a way to fight rising rates of violence. Many of the early social and emotional learning efforts in schools were developed to combat just such a challenge: teens’ use of drugs and alcohol, drop-outs, unwanted teen pregnancies, and other pitfalls of adolescence. When the W. T. Grant Foundation commissioned a study of all such programs to see what actually made some of them work (while others

did not), the teaching of social and emotional skills emerged among the crucial active ingredients.

Over the years since Linda and I first worked together, social and emotional learning has spread to tens of thousands of schools worldwide, and it continues to grow. Some of that growth was helped along by my 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence*, which argued that schools would better equip children for life if the curriculum included not just the academic basics, but also coaching in the basics of social and emotional competence. A heightened self-awareness, better ability to manage distressing emotions, increased sensitivity to how others feel, and managing relationships well are vital throughout life. But the foundation for these life competencies is laid in childhood.

Brain science tells us that a child's brain goes through major growth that does not end until the mid-twenties. Neuroplasticity, as scientists call it, means that the sculpting of the brain's circuitry during this period of brain growth depends to a great degree on what a child experiences day-to-day. During this window these environmental influences on brain growth are particularly powerful in shaping a child's social and emotional neural circuits. Children who are well nurtured and whose parents help them learn how to calm down when they are upset, for instance, seem to develop greater strength in the brain's circuits for managing distress; those whose parents neglect them will be more likely to act on aggressive impulses or have trouble calming down when they are upset.

Good parents are like good teachers. By offering a secure base, the caring adults in children's lives can create an environment that lets children's brains function at their best. That base becomes a safe haven, a zone of strength from which they can venture forth to explore, to master something new, to achieve. That secure base can become internalized when children are taught to better manage their anxiety and so more keenly focus their attention. This enhances their ability to reach an optimal zone for learning as well.

One way to ensure every child gets the best lessons of the heart is to make them part of the school day as well part of a child's home life. As I noted earlier, Linda and I are founding members of the

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, an organization based at the University of Illinois at Chicago that has set standards for SEL and helped school systems around the world bring these programs into their curriculum. The best social and emotional learning programs in schools are designed to fit seamlessly into the standard school curriculum for children at every age.

The question is, does social and emotional learning make a difference in children's lives? Now we have the answer: a definitive meta-analysis of more than one hundred studies compared students who had SEL with those who did not. The data shows impressive improvements among the SEL students in their behavior in and out of the classroom. Students not only mastered abilities like calming down and getting along better, but they also learned more effectively; their grades improved, and their scores on academic achievement tests were a hefty fourteen percentile points higher than similar students who were not given such social and emotional learning programs.<sup>1</sup> Helping children master their emotions and relationships makes them better learners.

Why helping children handle their inner world and relationships better boosts learning can be understood, too, in terms of the impact of SEL on children's developing neural circuitry. One area of the brain most shaped by experience during childhood is the prefrontal cortex, the brain's executive center. This area holds the circuits both for inhibiting disruptive emotional impulses and for paying attention—for calming and focusing. When children do not have strategies for decreasing their anxiety, less attention is available to them to learn, solve problems, and grasp new ideas. A child, for example, who gets panicked by a pop quiz, will actually imprint that response rather than the details of any material in the quiz. Distress kills learning. Scientists now believe that improving attention and memory, along with freeing the mind from impulsivity and distress, puts a child's mind in the best zone for learning. And social and emotional learning does just that.

Linda Lantieri has continued to be a pioneer in the movement to integrate social and emotional learning into schools throughout the

world. Currently she has been facing one of education's greatest challenges: how to help children who have suffered a shock like the events of 9/11 become more resilient, so they can bounce back from trauma and get on with their lives and education. Working with children in the schools closest to the former World Trade Center, Linda has developed a curriculum that can help any child calm the body, quiet the mind, and pay better attention.

These are skills that all children need, not just in school, but throughout life. Parents and teachers tell children countless times to "calm down," or "pay attention." But the natural course of a child's development means that the brain's circuitry for calming and focusing is a work in progress: those neural systems are still growing. Yet we can help them along by giving children systematic lessons that will strengthen these budding capacities. That's what Linda has done in her state-of-the-art curriculum in the New York City Schools, and what she offers any family or classroom here in this book and CD set.

When Linda asked if I would narrate the instructional exercises that teach these skills, I jumped at the chance. I'm honored to once again be involved with Linda Lantieri's groundbreaking work, this time as the voice that narrates the instructional CDs. And I'm delighted by the thought of the many children whose lives will benefit from this practical wisdom.

## CHAPTER 1



# Building Inner Preparedness

In downtown Manhattan on the morning of September 11, 2001, nobody could have predicted that within hours more than five thousand schoolchildren and two hundred teachers would be running for their lives. It was only the sixth day of school, and most classrooms were already well into their morning routines: unpacking book bags, saying hello to friends. In fact, when the first loud crash occurred, the sound didn't even seem that unfamiliar for New York City on a busy fall morning. Most teachers went on with their morning routines. Then there was the second sound that shook most of the buildings nearby and reverberated for blocks. And some saw what was happening right outside their classroom window. Principals and teachers started to get fragmented information as to what was happening. They soon realized that they were caught in the middle of an unimaginable event as thousands of children were anxiously looking to them to make sense out of what was happening.

Somehow the adults in charge knew that the only way they were going to be able to make the right decisions was to stay calm and help their children do the same. Most schools gathered their children in the gyms or cafeterias. They passed out crayons and paper to students who began to draw pictures of what they had already seen before the shades were drawn. They were drawing pictures of the

twin towers with what they thought were birds and butterflies falling from the windows.

The adults had so little to go on in terms of what to do. Their supervisors were advising them to do various things before all communication was cut off. But those supervisors were more than a mile away and really couldn't imagine what these teachers and principals were seeing firsthand. In the midst of profound uncertainty and danger, these adults had to make the ultimate decision of their careers as educators: saving the children would have to mean evacuating the school and running to safety.

Once they got outside, many were engulfed in a black cloud of dust as children walked and ran hand-in-hand, with some teachers leading them in familiar chants and rhymes to take the children's minds off what they were seeing and hearing. Many of the women teachers took off their high heels in order to run faster. As one third-grade teacher said: "The two eight-year-olds who were holding my hands ran as fast as I could. I'm not sure what kept me going as I hurtled forward in that river of running. . . . I would remember a day or two later that a child said to me, 'Look! Even the dogs are scared.'"

Miraculously, though debris fell around them and confusion reigned, not a single student or teacher's life was lost. In that moment, the adults in children's lives accessed the inner wisdom, courage, and calm it took to successfully evacuate whole schools of young children safely. Children who saw unspeakable sights somehow managed to persevere on their long march to safety that day and, grappling to make meaning out of disaster, imagined that bodies falling from the twin towers were birds in flight.<sup>1</sup>

What got these remarkable adults and children through that day was not how well those children had performed on the last standardized test they took. That day, facing the deepest tests of life, the question of academic preparedness took a backseat to the question of inner preparedness. Somehow enough principals, teachers, and students had the inner resources to connect to their deeper wisdom. In the midst of the devastation around them, they were able to remain calm and balanced. It was from such an internal state of relaxed



alertness that they were able to make the right decisions that would lead them all to safety.

Having been in Manhattan on that day and being among those who came to support the teachers and students of Ground Zero, I had some profound realizations. I became more deeply aware that the real tests of life can come a child's way at any moment, and that we as adults cannot protect our children from circumstances beyond our control. The question instead has become how to equip children with the inner strength they need to meet both the intense challenges and the great opportunities that come their way. Can we, in fact, cultivate the "ways of being" that helped both students and teachers at Ground Zero maintain calm and balance in the midst of such profound uncertainty and unknowing?

While certainly it could be argued that the teachers and children that day exhibited the inner resources they needed, what would it take to refill the well from which they had drawn so deeply? As the modern stresses of today's childhood accumulate in children, how can we cultivate the habits of mind, body, and heart it will take to continually relieve the pressure?

As children in the schools at Ground Zero reflected on their year in late June 2002, one young boy in an elementary school a block from the former World Trade Center looked at his teacher straight in the eye and said, "I'll never forget that on that day you held my hand, and you didn't let go." Those of us who are raising our children have to remember how important it is to nurture our own inner lives so that we can offer our children the kinds of support they need to develop their inner strength. We must not let go until we have helped our children feel that inner security.

## **WHAT THIS GUIDE IS ABOUT**

Since September 11, 2001, I have been involved in equipping thousands of children and adults with the skills and strategies that help them quiet their minds, calm their bodies, and identify and manage their emotions more effectively. As founder and director of the Inner Resilience Program, I have seen that the capacity to be more in

control of one's thoughts, emotions, and physiology can form a sort of internal armor that gives children the inner preparedness they need to face the challenges and opportunities of life.

This book offers some practical ideas and strategies for both you and the children in your care to develop the ability to appreciate silence and stillness by taking regular moments of quiet time together, and to become more skillful in managing stress. It presents an opportunity for you to give your family a scheduled time to bring balance, replenishment, and calmness into your lives. Patrice Thomas, in her book *The Power of Relaxation*, writes about a designated quiet time with children as "heart and soul time."<sup>2</sup> You can decide what you want to call it and even involve children in choosing a name.

The important point is that you are deciding to have this regular "heart and soul time" as a part of your family's routine. Secondly, in using the CD and accompanying material, you are providing the opportunity to develop some concrete skills in cultivating both your and your child's inner strength and emotional intelligence.

Depending on the age of your child (or children), this journey will be different. Young children, for example, still have a great capacity to access the inner dimensions you will explore here. They still have the ability to see beneath the surface of things. They are full of wonder and awe and can play creatively. Sometimes they can sense things that adults often take time to perceive or know. For example, young children are able to make quick intuitive decisions about whom they will be friendly with. However, when this aspect of a child is not affirmed and noticed, it becomes hidden and repressed. As a result, young children can lose touch with a part of themselves that is already quite well developed.

Sadly, as children move through their childhood, they often receive messages—spoken and unspoken—that the extraordinary experiences of their inner lives are not honored as part of their reality. They begin to think that they can't possibly know something intuitively or have deep compassion for someone, because they just aren't old enough. As children grow up, the more repressed, forgotten, and locked within themselves the awareness of their inner life becomes.

Adolescence offers an opportunity to reopen this line of inquiry, yet young people at this stage are usually met by the adult tendency to ignore or trivialize transcendental experiences. What complicates matters is that few of us have experienced being nurtured in these ways ourselves. If we hope to be a part of cultivating this approach with our children, we will each need to find positive models and experiences that can show us how to live in a more integrated way.

We suggest that you start doing this kind of work with children as young as five years old. Children this age are looking for cues from parents about what is safe to explore and what is not. Doing these exercises with children of any age gives them a clear message that we value and recognize their inner capacities. And it is important to do them regularly to get the benefits that they can provide. The goal is to bring stillness and balance, through the use of these techniques, to every aspect of your life and your child's life. Although this book talks about parents taking the lead in teaching these skills to children at home, teachers also can offer these strategies in the classroom setting. All of the suggestions and approaches in this book are equally applicable and adaptable to both the home and school environment.

I have chosen to focus on two practices in this book and CD for building inner resilience and enhancing emotional intelligence in children:

1. Relaxing the body (through progressive muscle relaxation and a body scan exercise)
2. Focusing the mind (through a mindfulness exercise)

This chapter describes some of the benefits of teaching children to have a regular practice of stillness, and it includes a review of some of the research that informs the work.

Chapter 2 provides some guiding principles, and it focuses on the role of the adult in creating the welcoming learning environment necessary for this work to flourish.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are separate chapters for each of the following age groups: ages five to seven, eight to eleven, and twelve years and up. Each chapter includes exercises, tailored to the proper age group, to do both before and after listening to the CD. The CD itself offers a

guided contemplative practice, led by Daniel Goleman, appropriate for the age of your child.

Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes some of the steps that can be taken to ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts on behalf of children.

The ideas and strategies presented here are not meant to be the solution to the various educational, behavioral, and health concerns children face. However, it is helpful for children and adults to have inner mechanisms available that reduce the body's stress reaction itself. Some of these benefits for both you and the children in your care include:

- Increased self-awareness and self-understanding
- Greater ability to relax the body and release physical tension
- Improved concentration and ability to pay attention, which is critical to learning
- The ability to deal with stressful situations more effectively by creating a more relaxed way of responding to stressors
- Greater control over your thoughts, with less domination by unwelcome thoughts
- Greater opportunity for deeper communication and understanding between parent and child, because you are sharing your thoughts and feelings on a regular basis

As you begin this journey of taking a regular quiet time with each of your children, we hope there will be benefits to you as well. You are likely to develop a heightened level of self-awareness and have a deeper understanding of who your child is. As you take these set times to be fully present with your child in a very different way than you have before, you may find that you are able to bring a new level of present-moment awareness to other parts of your day. I hope it will help you become more available to yourself and your children in general so that you, too, can cope more successfully with life's stressors and enjoy the heart and soul of parenting.