

Soulcentric Parenting of Preschool Children in an Egocentric World

To be soulcentric is to seek out the ways soul attempts to guide our relationships and individual development. It is to envision the principal goal of maturation to be the conscious discovery and embodiment of our human soul — our unique place in the more-than-human world of mountains, rivers, critters, farms, businesses, and schools.

To be *egocentric* is to treat the self as an isolated, competitive entity, an autonomous agent with minimal relationship or obligation to other people or the larger world.

In an egocentric society, infancy and early childhood (which, together, I call the stage of “the Nest”) is actually the easiest interval of life to navigate, for both children and parents, because it’s possible to oversee most influences in your child’s world. Your family’s and friends’ homes and your visits to relatively unpeopled nature compose the vast majority of your child’s domain. During her first four or five years, it’s possible to insulate your child from most of the egocentric influences of the surrounding society. This definitely won’t be true after the Nest. And it’s impossible to overstate the importance of the Nest as a foundation for all that follows.

Developmental Tasks of the Nest

The two primary parenting tasks of the Nest are the preservation of your child’s innocence and the healthy development of his or her sense of self. The principal accomplishment of this stage is a conscious, relational self still connected with wildness — its own and Earth’s.

Preserving your child’s innocence begins by simply opening your heart to her, to the preciousness and miracle of her existence, taking in all of her as she is. This means opening yourself to her fragility, her tenderness, the joy of her, and even to the potential

of losing her. In other words, you must allow *yourself* to be innocent. Be utterly present with your baby, not wanting her to be anything other than what she is right now, here, in your arms, not planning her future or hoping she turns out with one particular personality or talent over another. By being fully present with your child in the Nest, you're making the best contribution you can toward her soul discovery and fulfillment many years down the road. By preserving your child's innocence — the foundation of her relationality — you also enhance her potential to one day become a mature parent for her own children.

The loss or contraction of innocence is all too common in our egocentric society as a result of child-rearing practices and philosophies that emphasize obedience, indulgence, or preschool academic achievement. In America today, we are witnessing an escalating pressure on parents to drive their children to learn ever earlier and ever more. It's pretty easy to see that in most cases this "early enrichment education" is serving egocentric values. It's designed to help your kid compete, get ahead, crawl to the top of the heap, and be first in line for that all-important egocentric award, trophy, or winning school application. Set aside technological education until the school years, and banish coerced learning forever.

TV is another major egocentric influence. Despite your soulcentric values, have you surrendered to the use of the electronic babysitter? Research shows that overuse of TV, computer, and other media negatively affects the brain development of children.

Here are a few compassionate and, I hope, helpful questions that parents might ask themselves: Are you and your spouse or partner working more hours than necessary for the economic necessities of a nurturing Nest? If you were to stop purchasing the consumer items and services that don't deeply serve you and your children, could you work less and spend more time with your family, especially during your kids' first four years? (Do you really *want* to?) Could you move to a home or region that is less expensive, more accessible to wild nature, and closer to other parents

with small children?

Have you taken a close look at your core values? Are you clear about your highest priorities and deepest desires for your children's future?

Might there be some wounds from your own childhood, not yet sufficiently addressed, that make it difficult for you to open your heart more fully to your children?

Transforming the Culture

It's essential to help your child form a healthy personality that can survive and thrive in an egocentric society. Toward the end of the Nest, and during middle childhood, you'll want to teach your child how to cope with common egocentric fare such as out-of-control materialism, ubiquitous advertising, sexist and racist remarks and customs, and educational systems and teachers that might be far from progressive or ecoliterate. On the positive side, doing this will also be your initial step in helping your child form a personality that will become transcultural and, eventually, culture-transformative, as well as culturally viable. The soul-initiated person you hope your child becomes must, after all, develop a personality that can function *in* egocentric culture without being solely *of* it.

One of the most potent ways to contribute to cultural transformation is for you and your family to become role models — *you* make a radical change in lifestyle, if you can, if you dare, and if it feels right and inspiring to do so. The soulcentric lifestyle choices that you make really *do* have a significant impact on your community. Others who are ready to make similar changes will be inspired by your example. Culture shifts one individual and family at a time.

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