

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **All Aboard the Parent Coaching Express!**

### ***Coaching fits with today's lifestyles***

Perhaps you are a new mom who sleeps little and has many questions. You read your breastfeeding book while breastfeeding and snuggle with your partner while your new babe is wedged in your arms. You might call your best friend for a quick answer. However, whom do you call if you have a crisis of confidence, need help with scheduling, or find yourself amidst the newness of parenting? Most likely, you will call your parent coach who can guide you spontaneously over the phone. Your parent coach might also have training as a doula or a midwife.

Maybe you are a professional woman who works in corporate America and is the parent of three children. You are short of time as well as resources in your busy life. Your parent coach can help you with staying focused and balanced as a parent and guide your relationship skills with your children.

Perhaps as a corporate executive, you don't see your children as often as you like. While your children miss their Dad, they understand. However, as a Dad, you want the best quality time that is possible with your children. You want to be remembered by your children as a caring and compassionate person who will always be there for them. How do you grow loving relationships in a brief period? A Parent Coach can show you how to connect with your children in ways that they will remember and respect.

Today's parents are busier than ever.

*"One of the great challenges our society faces is balancing work and family. We value work for its role in producing and sustaining economic growth. We increasingly recognize the importance of strong families in building healthy and dynamic communities. But finding a proper balance between the demands of work and the needs of families is difficult. More mothers with children work than ever before. More single-parent households exist. Most people must work to provide for their families but feel torn between the demands of their jobs and the needs of their children, spouses and aging parents. At the same time businesses are finding it difficult to recruit, train and retain skilled workers."*

...Mary E. Forsberg

- ✚ Recent studies show that nearly two-thirds of mothers with children under the age of three are now in the work force.
- ✚ 59 percent of women with children under one year are employed and even among married-couple families, 51 percent are dual-earner.

### ***Today's parents are stressed for time***

Families with children are busier than ever. They have to handle all the pressures of the workplace PLUS the family responsibilities and homemaking that women in another generation considered to be a full-time job. Is it any wonder that parent coaches said the number one problem mothers want to talk about is stress?

Consider too, that about one-third of American children are growing up in single-parent households. As reported in the 2000 United States Census, more than 20 million children are living with one parent only. The number of fathers raising children without partners is increasing every year. For example, in just the three-year span of 1995 to 1998, this number increased by 25 percent, from 1.7 million single dads to 2.1 million. In the same period, single mothers remained constant at about 9.8 million.

These single parents do not have a partner to help them analyze and work through problems with their children and often need to consult a parent coach for direction and compassion.

### ***Parents are also lonelier***

Just as today's parents are busier and more stressed out than ever, they are also more isolated from family and friends.

Every year, more than 15 million Americans (or 14 percent of the population) moves to a new home, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This means that families are less likely to live near grandparents, aunts and uncles, other extended family and even old friends. Because the average American family moves every four years, many parents live far away from their extended families. Grandparents are no longer living down the block and available to baby-sit at a moment's notice. Many grandmothers are busy themselves with full-time jobs.

For his best selling book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community*, Robert Putnam reviewed questionnaires from more than 500,000 people. He reports that Americans are socializing less, even within their own families. They also join fewer organizations and are less likely to know their neighbors and get together with friends than they were 25 years ago. A generation ago, a man might join a bowling league, the Elks, the Rotary, and the Men's Club at church. His wife might participate in PTA, Bridge Club, and volunteer with Scouts and church. Today these organizations are folding for lack of members and volunteers.

Parents are too busy to form networks in their neighborhoods with other parents. Their hours are filled with work, home duties, errands and driving their children to activities.

Annemarie Brown, a coach who likes to work with stay-at-home mothers, says:

*Our society says to be independent, but humans desire to help each other and to live in groups. There should be twenty adults who pick up and cuddle that new baby. It takes a village to raise a child. As a society, we need to support our young mothers. Get elder women together and help them. Our society is not a safe place the way it was in "Leave it To Beaver" days. Parents need more help more than ever. If they don't have family nearby, a coach can help them create a network of "extended family" made up of friends*

*and such. They need help. First, they need to learn to ask for it and be proactive about their needs.*

As a society, we need to better support parents. In other societies, parenting is a different ballgame. There is plenty of extended family and support. We are an interdependent planet – we need to help parents. Life is about relationships and being interdependent, not doing it all on our own.

Likewise, Coach Anna Stewart of Boulder, Colorado, also says that one of the most pervasive problems today is that parents do not have any support system or sense of community:

*Our society values independence. We put our babies in cribs to make them independent. In other countries like Borneo, South East Asia and Thailand where I have lived, people are interdependent. I saw a beautiful sense of community there.*

When a problem does arise with their children, to whom can these isolated parents turn for advice? Advice from books and television psychologists can lead to what coach Natalie Gahrman calls “informational overload.” Today’s parents want practical how-to advice that is directed specifically to their individual problem.

*There is too much information available on how to be a good parent. As a coach, I am the filter, and help parents elicit which is the great stuff and to filter out distracting information. The book may have a theory of what to do, but your coach helps you implement the theory. Each person is different and needs a different plan of implementation*

Coaching is about implementation as well as information. The coach can impart wisdom and advice. Coaching may be about providing a role model. Many of today’s parents have their closest friendships with their co-workers at their place of employment. Often parents do not want to share intimate family concerns with co-workers. They also feel more comfortable talking about personal concerns in the privacy of their own homes and at their own convenience. Talking over the phone with their personal coach means that busy people do not have to drive to still another appointment.

In addition, some of today's parents do not want to turn to their own parents for advice. They want to raise their children differently from the way their parents raised them.

Even if they are close to their parents and do ask them for advice, many times grandparents do not understand what concerns today's parents. There may be cross-cultural differences among in-laws. Today's toys and other equipment for children are now technological. There are machines that enable a mother who adopts a newborn to breast feed the child. There are systems you can buy such as "Mozart for Babies" that are designed to stimulate a baby's intelligence. Children as young as eight want their own computers and cell phones, and they do not want toy versions.

Grandparents and older relatives may not understand the modern pressures on children and their parents. As noted previously, parents are under more time constraints and stress than ever before. Moreover, their children feel pressured by sophisticated marketing campaigns aimed to entice them to buy inappropriate items like violent video games, sexy clothing and non-nutritious foods. Children have to deal with being home alone and a peer group who experiments with drugs, alcohol and sex in middle school. Parents want HELP! Parent coaching fits neatly into this new demand for help.

### ***Seven Reasons Parent Coaching is Popular Today***

1. It is convenient for parents who are short on time. Many clients have more money than time to spend. They like the convenience of meeting over the phone. Parents who work with a coach are usually intelligent and make a fairly high income. Stephen Fairley and Chris Stout wrote in their book, *Getting Started in Personal and Executive Coaching*, that the average person who uses a personal coach is in the upper two-thirds of earning power, with an annual income of more than \$80,000 a year.
2. There is no stigma or embarrassment attached to phoning a coach, as opposed to going in for psychotherapy. If anything, it can be prestigious and stylish to have your own coach!

3. The service is personal and individualized. When parents try to use parent classes or books about parenting to solve problems, they have to wade through a ton of material that has nothing to do with their situation. Research indicates that parents are more likely to implement new strategies when they have support, encouragement and feedback.
4. The service is private and discreet. Your coach can live in another part of the country and you may never meet in public. Many parents like that convenience about coaching.
5. You can work through only one problem or focus on being a more effective parent over time. Parents have a specific question for a coach, such as, “How do I stop my child from tantrums?” When the tantrums end, the parent can end his coaching sessions whenever he wants. It is a paid service, not a medical problem.
6. Parent coaching is a good profession for people who have children because they can work out of their own homes and make their own hours.
7. It is an upbeat and positive experience for clients. Most people enjoy working with a coach and make quicker progress on their goals when they do.

The famous psychologist Carl Rogers once said that using a therapist was a little like buying a friend. Perhaps in this fast-paced world, people need friends more than ever. There is nothing like working through your problems and getting regular encouragement from a person who has a lot of common sense, empathy, compassion and knowledge. That is who your personal coach can be!

### ***Summary of chapter three***

Parent coaching as both a profession and a service continues to grow bigger every year. The reason is that today’s parents are more stressed and busier than ever, but also more isolated from friends and family. They like

the convenience, privacy and efficiency of paying a coach to work through problems and help them reach their goals on a one-on-one basis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Will You Make A Good Parent Coach?**

***A good parent coach is someone who can listen actively.***

Anyone can appear to be listening to you, and then a moment or two later, that same person cannot recall a thing you said. When someone does that to you, you feel neglected and discounted. On the other hand, when someone really hears you, asks you questions about what you're saying, wants you to clarify your statements so that he or she can really understand you, that is a huge compliment. You feel more alive. You feel that you truly exist for someone else. A good listener affirms your life.

#### ***Listening with the heart***

A parent coach has to be a good listener. A coach has to be able to listen for the emotional truth behind what each client is saying. After all, when someone speaks, that person could choose to talk about anything whatsoever in the entire world. Why does she choose that particular subject? What are the emotions around the subject? What is the person's history with that subject? Why is this parent having this particular problem instead of some other one? As a coach listens, the coach becomes an "emotional detective."

A parent coach has to learn to listen for narrative. Every client has a story to tell. What is that story? What are the gaps in the story? When you listen to that client, do you hear any themes? Do you feel an undercurrent of empathy for the parent's emotions? Does a parent repeat the same behavior and reactions again? What is it about behaviors and reactions that make him an individual?

### ***Listening is mostly what coaching is about***

*What I do is listen – most important, I listen. As I listen, I try to synthesize all the pieces they tell me into a picture. I make a cohesive whole out of the pieces. I piece together a story. I hear the person's story and from that, I can make out patterns in thinking and behavior.*

...Bobbie Burdett

You can learn to become a better listener, but you have to have a natural interest in people and their stories to become a parent coach. "Soulful listening," as one author called it, cannot be faked. You have an authentic interest in the other person and a deep desire to help that person work out his problems and make his life better. You have to listen with your heart. To do that, you need "emotional intelligence."

### ***Emotional intelligence***

While you can develop your skills as a listener, emotional intelligence is a natural tendency that you have derived from your personal style. In addition, emotional intelligence skills are learned behaviors.

Mark Brandenburg, therapist and coach, says, *"In any field some people are naturally good at it. Certification is important, but you need*

*certain personal traits, such as the inclination and capacity to help other people.”*

Are you open to other people? Do people naturally tell you their problems because you like to listen? Do people instinctively trust you, and know that you will keep their personal secrets and never use things told in confidence against them?

Dr. Daniel Goleman, a professor at Harvard University, argues in several of his best-selling books that “emotional intelligence is more important than IQ.” His phrase “emotional intelligence” refers to our capacity to be self-aware yet empathic, to be able to “read” other people, to put ourselves in their place and understand their emotions and struggles. It can even be about our capacity to love and be loved by others.

A good parent coach needs to listen, and needs to have emotional intelligence. A good coach tunes in to other people and their needs. He or she knows intuitively how to help others. A coach is able to motivate and give advice without seeming pushy or bossy. A coach helps a client with problems but does not take over the problems for that client.

Some people are natural-born athletes. They have good coordination, reflexes and strong bodies. A famous saying among athletics is, “You can’t teach speed.” You are born fast.

Emotional intelligence is like that. You can develop your gifts, but to some extent, you are born with a unique style of relating to people. An athlete develops natural gifts by training and practicing: you also can develop your natural gifts by training and practicing.

As a parent coach, you will assist, help, inform, inspire, and educate your clients. You will provide clarity, reflection and reality checks for parental illusion, and support a parent's intuition. A friend might call and

say, “I haven’t slept in three days. My child has the flu. I need a reality check on my parenting quotient.”

You will be both responsive and responsible as you provide frameworks and structures for conversations around sensitive issues. These are some of the traits you will need as a coach.

### *Traits for successful coaches*

- ✚ Active Listener
- ✚ Non-judgmental attitude toward others
- ✚ Loving
- ✚ Empathetic
- ✚ Aware
- ✚ Communicates clearly
- ✚ Accepting
- ✚ Congruent in speech and action
- ✚ Able
- ✚ Adjusted
- ✚ Confident
- ✚ Respectful
- ✚ Honest
- ✚ Tactful
- ✚ Humorous
- ✚ Flexible

Within your role as a parent coach, you will need the ability to support your client by listening. You will have to help your client become proactive and achieve

- ✚ Well-being
- ✚ Wholeness
- ✚ Wellness
- ✚ Optimism
- ✚ Resilience
- ✚ Significance
- ✚ Connection
- ✚ Natural Talents
- ✚ Possibility
- ✚ Action

### ***An understanding of children and their needs***

Although your clients will be adults, you may also be involved directly or indirectly as a coach with your client's children. You should have a genuine interest and love of children. You need a deep respect for children as human beings, because you become an advocate for their needs whenever you work with their parents. You will have to see problems not only from the client's point of view, but also from the child's viewpoint. You understand child development and child behaviors and have knowledge of which parenting techniques will work and which will not, according to each client's style and values.

## ***Business ability is important too***

Parent coaching is a business. In order to succeed as a parent coach, you will need the ability to set up and market your business to others. You will have to be firm about collecting payment from your clients, and clear about how much you can be available to them.

You might establish time boundaries, financial expectations and goals for your services. Are you going to set up an “on-call” business that may disrupt your family life, or do you truly have the flexibility to take telephone calls at all times? Although the costs of starting up a parent coaching business are small because you can work out of your home, you still need to know if you will be able to put enough time and energy into it to have a profitable and passionate business. Through personal experience, you develop the ability to avoid the burnout you can get if you take on too many of your clients’ burdens. Your entrepreneurial spirit soars in your desire to make a difference. Albert Switzer once said that the only happy people he saw were those in service to others.

## ***Your parent coaching toolbox***

Besides developing your listening skills and empathy with others, you will need to develop some practical resources to offer your clients.

**Complete your training courses and get certified.** After you complete your training as a parent coach, most coaches like to keep learning new techniques, honing their styles, and continuing their education in the field.

**Develop your knowledge of child development and parenting techniques.** It is normal for a two-year-old to have tantrums. On the other hand, if a ten-year-old is having tantrums, that child may have anger management issues. If you have personal experience in raising your own children, along with your parent coach training, it will help you gain a feel

for normal child development. You may want to keep developing your knowledge by reading good child development books, and keeping some on hand as reference tools.

Likewise, you need to develop your knowledge of appropriate parenting techniques, which you will find in books, by observing others, or continuing with training in specialty niches at the Academy for Coaching Parents International.

**Have some reference tools.** Third, you will know how to find answers when you are stumped or need to identify strategies. You will need some good reference materials at hand in the form of books and experts you can consult in an emergency. A typical case may be that you and your client have tried various popular approaches to toilet training, but the child has resisted them all. Now is the time to come up with a creative and less well-known technique. You may be able to find this new technique in books or by consulting with an expert.

**You'll seek local support professionals.** If you are coaching clients all over the country, you will have to learn how to help your clients find the names of lawyers, mental health professionals, pediatricians, psychiatrists, and support groups if certain problems come up.

For example, if you have a client who has a child with Attention Deficit Disorder, you will want to steer that client to the local CHADD group – a support for Children with Attention Deficit Disorder. If you have a client about to divorce, he or she will need a local lawyer who specializes in child custody cases.

### ***Summary of chapter four***

The most important part of parent coaching is listening to others in a meaningful way, so that you can help them make sense of their experience and work through their problems. A good parent coach needs emotional

intelligence, which is about “reading people,” understanding their emotions, and reaching out to help them. Parent coaches also need good training, practical knowledge of parenting techniques and child development, and the resources to help clients find other professionals in their area. They should also have a love and respect for children.

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i Mary E. Forsberg, “Perspective on Family Leave.” New Jersey Policy Perspective, July, 2005.

[http://www.njpp.org/rpt\\_familyleave.html](http://www.njpp.org/rpt_familyleave.html)