

## Chapter One warmth

*Jimmy, thumb in his mouth, stood in his batman socks next to his snow boots looking expectantly at his mother. She smiled, knelt down, pulled him on her lap and sang “You put your right leg in, you take your right leg out” as she slipped the boots on one foot and then the other. He smiled around the thumb as she zipped him up. He took his thumb out of his mouth, and she kissed his forehead. “Ready to go buddy?” she said as she tucked his hands into his mittens.*

Our best memories of childhood contain warmth:

a winter jacket zipped up with a kiss on the cheek,

a blanket pulled over an adolescent sleeping on the sofa.

the smell of fresh baked cookies melty with chocolate chips,

hot enough to warm your hand.

a heartfelt hug

sitting on daddy’s lap or

next to mommy while she holds the baby and reads a story

a fire in the fireplace, telling stories, roasting

marshmallows, turning off the lights around the house

and pretending it was long ago.

My mother-in-law, a much beloved grandmother, has a habit of placing her hand gently on the side of my daughter's face with a brief gentle touch that communicates love and acceptance. All of these contain the most important element of parenting: warmth, a very physical and emotional connection.

Hospitals have come to recognize the importance of this warmth instead of whisking newborn babies to the nursery where they lay in little cribs all crying or napping, newborn babies are placed on their mother's chest, or against her father's shoulder. Fathers are welcomed in the delivery room, and when newborns feel their father's arms for the first time and connect that warmth, that feeling of being held with the gentle voice speaking in words not yet understood, but felt.

A warm attachment begins physically with touching, holding, feeding, changing, rocking. Even at first our voice physically touches the child. Eventually, the verbal tone, the holding, touching and seeing become a set of experiences through which the child experiences safety, relief, physical nurture, well being, all of which is love. Warm attachment is the base skill from which all good parenting flows beginning with newborns, throughout middle childhood, adolescence and beyond.

*It had been a long day at work, nonstop, no lunch break and more phone calls than Zoe could answer. Her husband was traveling, and she arrived home, frazzled, about ten minutes after her youngest came home. The sounds of the TV drifted in from the den and there were lights on throughout the house. Two backpacks sat slumped sideways inside the door, and one coat had made it to the chair while the other lay six inches away, on the floor. Zoe sighed the working parent sigh*

*and followed the sound of the TV into the brightly lit family room, feeling the pull of that invisible chord of love for her daughters.*

*“Mo-om, Susie stole the remote and hid it”.*

*“Mom! She was watching Sponge Bob and I am sick of                      Sponge Bob, I just  
wanted to watch Raven. You know she likes                      Raven, too. ”*

*“I’m hungry”*

*“Mom, I need posterboard tonight, I have a project due                      tomorrow.”*

*“Mo-om, you promised to help me make my thanksgiving                      turkey...you have to  
Moom.. When is Daddy coming home?”*

*“Mo---om I’m really hungry, can we have McDonald’s?”*

*“Mom, I hate McDonald’s. Why can’t we have a sit down                      dinner, let’s go to  
Friendly’s”.*

*“Friendly’s takes too long. I’m hungry now”.*

*Under the weight of all these complaints, Zoe sank onto the sofa and the two girls piled on top, her youngest throwing her arms around her mother’s face and planting a warm wet kiss while the older grabbed her free hand and everyone snuggled together. Zoe smiled the first smile since lunch, thinking to herself “this does not solve the problem of dinner,” but when she heard this deep sigh come from her younger daughter. Zoe felt this tremendous peace and she found her voice heavy and sweet saying “How’s my two girls?” At the same time, her arm reaches for the phone to order pizza.*

Zoe, the tired and stressed mother, calmed a potentially explosive situation by choosing to react with patience and touch. Her reactions calmed the upset of her hungry, tired daughters. Even though the behavior of her daughters was difficult, even obnoxious, Zoe did not lose sight of the crucial issues and when the children’s constant whining she reacts with humor and warmth. She

connects and that is warmth.

Warmth creates the essential bond between parent and child. Warmth can move children from upset to stability. For this reason, warmth is critical for development of children.

If we were to look at the surface of the situation, the truth is that the two girls are very hungry, and most parents realize this is a physical reality that is solved with food. And certainly, the calmness will not last long if Zoe was only calming. However, the problem cannot be solved by solving the hunger only. What is also needed is for the two girls to **know** that their mother **understands what they need and will take care of it**. They also know that their mother understands what they want, and while that is not necessarily provided, it is accommodated. They expect their needs will be heard and addressed.

This combination of involved sensitivity and positive reciprocity creates the emotional stability through the skills of self-regulation and internal control. Kuczynski & Hilderbrandt, in their research published in 1997, noted that human beings are raised in a community, and this means that they learn from each other, parents then become what these researchers called “core teachers”. When a parent is warm, when they sense what a child needs, and when that parent is aware of what that child experiences and needs that parent teaches a child something significant about the world.

*She had been crying on and off all day. Five day old Joyce cried and wailed. “Maybe she’s hungry” Russell said. “No,” Maria nearly wailed herself, “I just fed her.” Russell bounced the baby up and down while Maria answered the phone. Russell listened over the crying as Maria held the phone to his ear: “Just put the baby down and let her cry herself to sleep. She’ll learn not to cry” Joyce’s great great aunt offered. “It’s what I always did. She’ll stop crying eventually”. Maria made a face, but her voice was kind as she thanked her for her advice, got off the phone quickly and turned to her husband. That’s ridiculous. She’s crying for a reason, how can we ignore her.?”*

*A day of frustration was in her voice, and Russell noted the exhaustion in her face as he bounced the baby, patted her on the shoulder and said “there, there, it’s ok” in a cadence that matched the baby’s wimpers.*

In this short scenario, the beginnings of good attachment are forming. A wailing baby at first makes us melt, but after a while, the babies crying begins to feel stressful, which, is, by the way exactly what the baby is feeling. In the vignette above, the parents are sensitive to what the baby is feeling. Maria dismisses her great aunt’s advice to let the baby cry by himself and, fortunately, she does not worry about pleasing her relative but she does worry about **why** the baby is crying and **what to do** about it. She is **aware of what the baby is feeling**, and she is **involved in responding to her**. That is sensitive reciprocity.

Russell is also involved with his child. He is holding Joyce and gently bouncing her. He is sensitive to the babies upset and involved in calming her. Maria engages in positive reciprocity. She moves toward problem solving in a way that does not unnecessarily punish, but acknowledges this stressful crying. Russell uses positive reciprocity as he responds to the baby’s crying with a voice that matches the cadence but lowers the sound. Russell probably does not know he is doing this, but he using a valuable calming technique. Eventually, the child begins to expect that when her tummy is out of control and hurting, her parents will find the solutions to resolve the issue. This is the creation of trust, the basic building block of all human relationships. In this moment these two parents are being excellent providers, core teachers.

What is absolutely crucial is that, neither Maria nor Russell respond to the baby out of their feelings of frustration or helplessness. They contain or manage these feelings, as when Maria gives the baby to Russell when she is feeling very stressed.

What creates stability for children is this movement toward calming when the child is upset, as well as providing stimulation when the baby is too calm. Such as in the case of a baby lying

quietly in the crib in the morning and tired parents roll over in

bed, a few moments of calm, time for a cup of coffee....but something nags at the edge of their awareness. 'Is the baby OK' they wonder. Instead of enjoying the break from early morning parenting, usually the parent will tiptoe into the where the child is sleeping and stand over the crib, cooing, talking in a soft voice. The child awakens to a soft and welcoming voice, before their stomach is wrenched with deep hunger. At the first sign of fussing, the morning feeding will begin. The connections this child feels are ones that bring a sense of safety and trust.

A toddler screams with toddler rage, unable yet to contain it, and the parent stands quietly aside, allowing them to have their moment, or quietly removes them from the store to the car. The child is allowed to feel her anger, to get used to it.

A child comes home from school, drops a backpack on the floor grabs a drink from the refrigerator and sits in front of the television set or picks up a video game. The parent approaches the child with calm interest and says "hello, kiddo. How was school today?"

In this way, parents create a safety of emotion, when the child is too upset, the move to calm and when the child is too withdrawn they move to include. In this way they create a fence, an emotional boundary where the child will not be so lonely their life will be empty and cold. Nor will it be so chaotic and dangerous. This creates a safe and predictable world, one where the child can have a sense of control over their world, a sense of trust of those around them. While they are sensitive to the mood, they are also involved--calming, or exciting as is needed by the child.

It is essential that for the most part, the parent is responding to what is going on for the child, and not trying to meet their own needs with the child. The crying child is not "trained" to be quiet (to satisfy the parent's need for quiet), but parents struggle with how and what to provide (is it food?

Rest? An upset stomach?) In this way they contain the child within a safety net of feeling.

Perhaps that is best seen in what happens to a child when instability is created, when there is no creation of self regulation and internal control. What happens when the fences that awaken and soothe are missing?

*Melanie lies alone in the hospital. She is awake but dazed. There is a flurry of activity around her. Occasionally she is picked up, wet clothes removed, foot stuck with a sharpness, liquid food put into her mouth. She is touched occasionally, sometimes there is a soft voice but for the last three weeks she has been alone with her IV. She is quiet, sleepy. She hears noise in the background, but as a baby she does not realize they are calling her a placid baby and celebrating that she is alive. All she knows is the sensations around her.*

Melanie is placid because crying brings no response. She has learned not to expect. Crying has not brought change into her life. When she was first born she cried, and her professional caretakers got to her as they could, but they are not staffed enough to lift her up and hold her while she cried, at least for more than a few minutes. Nor could they consistently respond to her when she began to cry or tend to her when she continued to cry once her diapers were changed and the bottle given. Sometimes she was held, and sometimes she lay there whether she was hungry, tired, had a sick stomach or simply needed to yell. She heard kind voices but not in response to her. More importantly, she was touched only to feed her, change her or give her an examination. She lacks consistent reciprocity as well as responsiveness. For the most part, she is untouched.

The dangers of too little touch have been documented through statistics of the infant mortality in orphanages as well as in hospitals. According to Goldman (1998) premature infants who were massaged for fifteen minutes three times a day gained weight 47% faster than babies left alone. They became more active and more responsive to faces and rattles and were discharged sooner than the infants who were not touched.. While they gained weight more, they did not eat more...so their

weight gain was a result of contact on metabolism, according to Tiffany Field. Research indicates that children who are touched are less aggressive, healthier and more likely to interact with parents.

When that warmth is not provided, the impact on the child is a sense of helplessness, depression, a lack of problem solving skills. Ge, Best, Conger & Simons (1996) studied adolescents and found that those with depressive and conduct problems had lowest levels of parental warmth and disciplinary skills and highest levels of parental hostility.

*Six years later Melanie sits in her second grade class. The desk next to her has been inched farther away. None of the other students want to sit near her. "You smell like pee" someone whispers when they walk by. The teacher is disgusted. The smell turns her stomach. Melanie's hair is not combed and her clothes are dirty. The teacher talks to her in a nice voice, and Melanie looks at her blankly, suddenly trying to figure out what the teacher wants her to do. Melanie smells like urine because her mother stayed in bed this morning. Melanie has been punished for wetting the bed, which at the age of 6 is still normal. She is afraid to get out of bed at night, and in the morning hides her sheets in the closet. She is very ashamed of this and while she is not aware that she smells, she is aware that there is something very wrong with her.*

*After seeing that the teacher has moved on and is no longer speaking to her, Melanie breathes a sigh of relief and drifts off again into her own world. She is worried about her mother who has been using drugs. Boyfriends are moving in and out of the house. Melanie brushes the hair from where it has fallen in her face. The one who was very kind to her has just left, her eyes fill up with tears, but she doesn't know why. she was fond of is gone. She is worrying about her mother and moving before she hears the snickers. Suddenly she realizes the teacher is scolding her: "Melanie are you paying attention?" Melanie jolts awake just like she did in the hospital. She feels her cheeks become red and her eyes start to fill up with tears, but she pushes them back. She wishes she could talk to the teacher, but she doesn't know what to say. She feels shy and awkward*



*and unable to make them like her as She feels the disdain of her classmates, she sees them draw back, but she is not quite aware it is because she smells bad. She feels as though it is just her. She has taken the lowest place in the elementary class pecking order. She will accept this as what she deserves and expects.*

Too little warmth affects the ability to interact, verbally and nonverbally, with others. For Melanie, when she does not experience that consistent positive responsiveness, she does not develop a sense of confidence in herself.

In this scenario, Melanie's mother is neglecting her. She does not get up to get her to school, nor does she think to set out breakfast. Melanie is left to figure this out on her own. No one has bought healthy cereal or her favorite cereal. Most likely she no one knows her favorite cereal and so Melanie does not think that anyone should be informed of this at all. In other words, she does not expect anyone would want to know what goes on in her life.

Secondly, when Melanie wets the bed, she is confronted with her mother's anger. The mother is angry not on Melanie's behalf, not in order to teach her, but because Melanie's mother cannot cope with this. She perceives Melanie as someone who must not trouble her any further. What Melanie feels or what she thinks is not important to her mother, and because she has not been valued, she will not expect to be valued. She will learn that to be unnoticed is safe, and to be noticed is dangerous. When she encounters other children who seem confident, she will feel confused -- and inferior. Melanie does not expect to be loved and does not know how to reach out and ask for help. She sees herself as incapable and ineffective and without intervention, she will approach life from that basic perspective. She interprets and reacts to the world from this perspective. In other words, she will expect herself to fail.

*Joyce is chewing on the end of her pencil and daydreaming, just like Melanie. In fact, she sits two desks away from Melanie and she is thinking about her birthday party. The invitations are in her*

*desk, to be given out at recess. Joyce is so excited. Her parents are allowing her to invite everyone in her class. They are going to the roller rink and, as she sits in class, she sees herself skating around the rink with her best friend Alison. As the odor drifts towards her, Joyce looks at Melanie and feels sad. . She feels the embarrassment that Melanie feels. "Are you working or daydreaming Joyce?" The teacher's voice pierces Joyce's daydreams and she gets back to her seatwork. She doesn't worry too much. The teacher's voice was gentle and she smiled as she saw Joyce get back to work. Birthdays are such a distraction, she thought as she remembered Joyce's conversations with her early in the morning about her birthday party. All the girls had been talking about it and were anxious to get their invitations.*

Like Melanie, Joyce is daydreaming, a common behavior of children in school. However Joyce is not emotionally thrown by the redirection of the teacher. She has learned from her parents that authority is there to help her and she simply complies with directions because she trusts it is the right thing to do. There is no confusion because she is aware of the classroom, aware of the flow and confident that she will be ok. There are none of Melanie's worries about being safe. No issues of shame interfere with her ability to accept direction. It simply is not a terrible thing to be told what to do.

Where Melanie's early experience of other people was being manipulated, changed, pricked, scolded, Joyce's experience was being warmly included in her parents lives: being bounced up and down gently on her father's shoulder, being fed close, skin to skin with her mother, smelling, tasting touching the love around her. Before she had words to formulate her ideas, there are vivid and important experiences of love that are physical...that include gentle touch, responsiveness and the ability to moderate her emotions. There are experiences of love that are emotional. When she cries, an adult will move to soothe her, when she is in her mother's lap quietly, someone coos at her, looks into her eyes and smiles. When her diapers are being changed, there is time for a little talking, cooing, light touches on her feet, and kisses.

Melanie expects people to be distant and to collide suddenly and unexpectedly and sometimes painfully into her world; for Joyce people are a part of her world, a part of a loving universe. Melanie seeks time with the teacher to chat about fun things in her life. She expects someone will care about her birthday, her thoughts, even her sorrows. Melanie has not the words to talk about her life while Joyce naturally chats and interacts.

In many ways, it looks to the world as if Melanie is not doing much. After all, she is unkempt and smells like she should have taken a shower. She shrinks back and seldom raises her hand. Perhaps she is called lazy and sloppy. But the truth is that Melanie is working hard. She gets herself out of bed, makes her own breakfast and takes herself to school. If her homework is completed, it is because she makes herself do her homework. No one puts out a desk for her to sit and do homework. She may eat cereal for dinner that she makes. Probably she will be cooking in a few years. But she will not feel confident or proud, she will look blankly at anyone who would say that, because she is not used to anyone giving what she does value. Underneath she will feel vaguely resentful and largely inferior.

Joyce probably also works hard in her life. She does her homework, and perhaps chores in the house. She emotionally tunes into her parents and fills their lives with joy. She may caretaker her friends and she works hard to meet expectations. Her life has love and she will be confident.

Based on the research of risk and protective factors, Joyce will probably do well throughout school, which will make it more likely that she will be successful in her endeavors. She will delay gratification, recognize feelings in herself and others and will know how to calm herself down and get herself moving. Melanie will not know self-soothing skills, without intervention. She is not predetermined, but simply more likely to struggle with depression, to have troubled relationships and may have failing relationships with herself and with friends, more likely to be stuck in violent relationships, and less likely to seek help. In fact, low warmth is the strongest indicator of

psychopathology, and depression.