



Introduction

A few years ago I had the pleasure of meeting Sarah Woodhouse and becoming involved in the Charity she founded over 20 years ago, ***Right from the Start***. Since then I have worked with her as series editor and now as a Project Adviser. Sarah is an inspiring woman and though she is now an Octogenarian, her passion for supporting parents in their universal need and longing to give their babies and children the best start in life, continues to burn strongly.

My work for over 30 years has been in helping children who are traumatized to recover. Often the most serious childhood traumas happen in the first few years of life. The lack of warm and ongoing support available to many parents is often a major factor. Anything that can be done to inform, inspire and encourage parents' skills and strengths – and to find joy in their babies and children, wherever they are and whatever their circumstances, can only be one of the greatest of blessings. Early Intervention and Prevention in the lives of children is the best investment we can make not only in their lives but to the future of society.

Please take a few minutes to read Sarah's following article about *Right from the Start*, look at the website and free- download the first e-book in the series. Please share with anyone you think may be interested.

Patrick Tomlinson

I am going to start with a story about the earliest memories of a child. The seeds that are sown even before birth and especially during the first three years of life have a huge impact on the growing brain, personality and spirit of every developing child and the adults they become.

This is the story:

There was once a small, skinny child – a girl - she was about five, who could remember almost everything that she had watched intently or experienced ever since she was about 18 months old.

She could also remember, with crystal clarity, every strong feeling or emotion that had engulfed her - and what had triggered it. Things like –

The shudder of joy and relief at being picked up from her cot - after waking and finding her mum was out of sight and there was no smile waiting for her when she first opened her eyes.

Amazement watching ducks waddling in a line past her buggy.

Distress when she saw her mum's face sad or frowning - not smiling at all.

Panic at being put down in a strange place to sleep - and the door closing.

Astonishment at being given a whole tomato to hold in her hand.

Fascination - watching a goat's lips nibbling grass.

Anxiety at seeing a man with a beard for the first time - because it hid his mouth.

Lots of little fears like moths bumping against walls and ceilings at night.

Rage at being whisked away from watching an egg frying.

Feeling too scared to understand cross words, spoken too fast, by impatient adults.

Misery and fear when grown-ups would not explain what was going on.

The rush of happiness, aged 3, of the tug-tug-tug pull of bottle-feeding a new-born lamb.

A few years later staying awake, rigid with worry, every time my mum and dad went out in the evening. I felt that they might not ever come back. I only fell asleep the moment I heard the car's engine as they returned.

That small skinny child was myself. I grew up convinced of the big and lasting connection between how we treat our children in their earliest years and how we fare as a community and a society.

We know more than ever before about what children need in order to thrive – in areas as diverse as neuroscience, touch and nutrition.

We also know how and why human health and happiness depend upon background essentials such as:

- an absorbing connection with some part of the natural world; with music; with dance; with art and poetry - and how these things are able, more than other experiences and passions, to lead us from childhood into lives of empathy, compassion and creativity. And an impetus to heal human hurt.
- the power of sunlight/daylight and of play and exercise in green places.
- Finding and treasuring beauty in objects, buildings and places.
- safe, deep and undisturbed sleep most nights for long enough to 'catch up with' the mental, emotional and physical energy expended during the day

I became the Founder and (unpaid) Chief Executive of a charity called *Right from the Start* set up to undertake research, in depth and worldwide, into the earliest roots of stress, fear and violence in children's lives, and to develop a wide-ranging, healing and creative response.

Right from the Start is there to help parents shine, right from the start, towards building a recovery of confidence and peace within families and communities. We are also there to inspire neo-natal and childcare professionals – especially midwives, Health Visitors, Social Workers and Nursery and Primary teachers to respond sensitively and with a new understanding to the mental, emotional and spiritual needs of parents and their children.

Helping parents with a crying baby and broken nights seem to be the first and most critical area for concern. Such extreme stress and fatigue is known to be the first cause of child abuse (a 3-year research programme by the NSPCC has shown that one in four mothers hit their babies before they are a year old because of their mind-numbing exhaustion, helplessness and despair).

We know that the quality of a child's sensations in the womb and experiences during their earliest years has an indelible and life-long effect on their confidence, empathy and behaviour – and their own parenting sensitivity and skills in the future.

We recognise that Peace – also Violence - in every community begins with a baby.

Right From the Start has just published its first e-book – an update and re-enlivened version of the original paperback; ‘**Sound Sleep**. Calming and helping your baby or child to sleep.’ This can be downloaded free of charge from our website.

This book has already been warmly endorsed by parents and professionals;

I found such a sense of peace and tenderness in this book – it makes me feel completely balanced and able.

Diana, a new mother

I feel a great affinity with your approach, based as it is on such great respect for both parents and children . . . it is as concerned with creating loving relationships between parents and babies as it is with advice for sleep problems.

Eileen Hayes, Parenting Adviser to the NSPCC

Whether you have a baby who cries more than you can bear, or an endlessly waking-and-wailing child in the night, get this book! It’s fantastic. It paints so many useful pictures and tells stories you will never forget. It gave me hope and got me smiling again.

Single mother with a two-year old

*Reading the wonderful warm tone in which *Sound Sleep* is written with its non-prescriptive attitude, the variety of different approaches that are considered in the book and the way it is written make this book exceptional. It goes beyond prevention to promotion, from stopping the worst to planning the best . . .*

Hetty Einzig, Former Research and Development Director of the Parenting Education and Support Forum.

This book is unbelievable. . . it’s wonderful . . . there’s nothing else like it

The Bounty Advisory Team

The Right from the Start project

Our logo of a boy playing with a leaping dolphin has been chosen because dolphins have great intelligence and show a close affinity with people, especially children. They never stop playing, have a boundless sense of fun and have an unique capacity to calm and comfort a child who is ill or in distress.

On our website www.right-from-the-start.org you can discover full details about those of us working for the Charity, our aims and objectives and the work in progress to complete, publish and promote the over-arching *Right from the Start* series of books. You can also join us through our Twitter page @RightFTS.

We believe in the universality of children and their needs, wherever they are in the world and their rights as enshrined in the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

This serious downside is the background to our work:

- The increase in verbal, emotional and physical violence in the home and family breakdown – often resulting from their own poor childhood experiences or a lack of loving support for every woman as soon as her pregnancy is confirmed.
- A decline in community, extended family and neighbourly support and friendship offered to young families across cultural, religious and educational divides.
- The social alienation of some children through neglect or abuse and their inability to make friends, build lasting relationships and to learn.
- An increase in consumerism and materialistic values. These have displaced human values and the loving sharing in families and within the community which are best able to build up children’s social skills, empathy and happiness.
- The advance, at breakneck speed, of the IT age with its wonderful advantages but also its potential for being the source of untold harm to children through their easy access to hard pornography and the growing habit of cyber-bullying and ‘sexting’ by ever younger children.
- Television viewing - by children of all ages, including toddlers - of scenes of human destruction, cruelty, fear, domination and increasingly realistic horror, often on a daily basis, and the effect of this on the way their brains grow and connect.
- The growing prevalence of bullying, aggression and violence within our homes, schools, housing estates, at sporting events and in the streets through a growing gun-and-knife gang culture.

These life-changing influences are leading to:

- An increasing number of parents who are anxious, lonely and struggling – therefore distressed or angry or both – and finding it difficult to cope with the pressures of parenthood.

- An increasing numbers of children who have become withdrawn and inert or aggressive and out-of-control - or actively violent and bullying.

This evidence provides the 'starter knowledge' towards understanding and responding creatively to the root causes of the depression, aggression and cruelty, which increasingly threatens to destroy human values and dim the spirit of kindness and compassion.

Right from the Start's organisational aims:

Our over-arching aim is to have a transforming impact on children at the earliest stages in their lives (from conception), to enhance their ability to realise their full potential and have a positive knock-on effect on their families and communities - from generation to generation.

To this end we work to:

- Ensure greater and continuing friendship, understanding, teaching and support for expectant and new parents – especially for mothers.
- Build a background of 'strong' love and security into the lives of children, particularly during their ultra-sensitive, first three years when the greatest good can be achieved or harm done.
- Break the cycle of parental ignorance, loneliness and fear – the forerunner of neglect and abuse.
- Nurture children's inborn capacity for wonder, sociability, kindness and co-operation.
- Encourage a greater awareness of the brave, resilient and creative spirit there in every child (and indeed in all of us) across ALL social, cultural, educational and religious divides.
- Enhance the knowledge, skills and self-confidence of ALL the adults concerned with the nurture, care and teaching of children.
- Prevent children being drawn into a culture of greed, aggression and violence.

Our key themes

The findings from *Right from the Start's* research have enabled us to identify the following key themes that form the basis of our work.

1st Theme: Best Beginnings.

This consists of three follow-on books as described in the **Books and Products** page of our website.

These books will provide (alongside **Sound Sleep. Calming and helping your baby or child to sleep**) a valuable package of ideas, information, parenting skills and inspiration for expectant and new parents.

They cover:

- children's brain and personality development in the womb and the heart-brain connection and conditions for its development. There are millions of brain cells (neurons) in the muscles of your heart and these communicate with the neurons in your prefrontal cortex - a non-stop, day and night conversation which goes on via special nerves and the electro-magnetic energy which runs around the whole of the human body. (It is believed that it is this close working together of our heart and brain that brings about the development of a loving, lovable human being; awakening and growing in us the capacity for compassion, empathy, generosity, kindness, forgiveness, imagination, creativity – and wisdom).
- self-knowledge and self-care for parents – especially mothers.

2nd Theme: Creativity – at home and school

Encouraging children's imagination and creativity. Helping every child to develop a sense of their own value and their place in the world through exploring as many different sources as possible for their individual interests, creativity and contentment.

3rd Theme: Physical Activity – at home and school

Responding to and encouraging children's deep and instinctive need for movement -energetic movement, rhythmic movement, repetitive movement and a wide variety of action skills - without which no child's brain is able to develop fully and in balance.

4th Theme: Empathy and Compassion – at home and school

Encouraging parents' baby and toddler calming and handling skills. Enabling children's understanding of themselves and each other through watching, sharing everyday activities, story- telling with the potential to learn parenting skills from the moment they are born. Also the demonstration of kind and compassionate talk and behaviour by the adults around them.

5th Theme: A Sense of the Spirit – at home and school

Supporting every child's original sense of 'belonging' and being part of the whole of creation. Deepening the connection between parents and children and the trust and affection between teachers and children through touch, humour, shared effort, exploration, fun and games. This includes such practices as massage, meditation, yoga, dance, singing and making music together and connecting with the natural world - especially other living creatures.

All the *Right from the Start* books are designed to act as 'bridges' of understanding between all the adults involved, particularly between parents and their midwives, Health Visitors and Social Workers; and between parents and their children's teachers

Through stories, pictures and experiences from around the world, we seek to make information and critical research findings accessible, memorable and relevant to the needs of parents, carers and professionals.

We will do all we can to ensure that our work reaches parents and everyone concerned with the nurture and upbringing of children through our continuing contact with such statutory and voluntary organisations as the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA), Sure Start children's centres, Home Start, Netmums, the National Childbirth Trust (NCT), Young Minds, the Family and Parenting Institute, the Family Nurse Partnership, Coram Family, the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, maternity units, Birthlight, the National Children's Bureau, Bounty Services, Baby Welcome, Cry-sis, NSPCC, Positive Parenting and the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE).

We shall continue to work in the UK with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children - set up in the UK '*to raise greater awareness in the Houses of Parliament of aspects of the well-being of the nation's children and our obligations under the **Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989)** and to work with children . . . children's organisations, and . . . to promote first class policy for children.*'

We shall also continue to work with child care statutory and voluntary organisations across the world.

Feedback:

I strongly believe that the success of our efforts to tackle social breakdown and create a healthy society will depend, in large part, on the efforts of organizations such as Right from the Start.

David Willetts, MP

We have an affluent society which is educated, has the social ability, educational research to find out how we grow and develop and it is scandalous that we let so many young lives go to waste, fail to flower, go wrong and end up stunted, damaging themselves or perhaps the rest of society... We have got further and further away from common sense - our innate ability to nurture, to care and eventually to educate each other. We are nervous of common sense because everything around us has become more specialised and less personal and human.

***Right from the Start** touches on what is common to us all - basic humanity in this very, very pressurised world.*

Kate Adie, OBE
Journalist and BBC News Presenter

*Children really are the key to unlocking so much that is wrong in our world. There is a good way to be a parent....to bring up children....to enjoy and learn from children – and there are not such good ways. What **Right from the Start** is striving to do is part of that goodness.*

George Alagiah, OBE
Journalist and BBC News Presenter

*The importance of **Right from the Start** is that it goes beyond prevention to promotion, from stopping the worst to planning the best... the most courageous aspect of **Right from the Start** is to bring together a whole range of different dimensions of life. It is a holistic project. It dares to talk about spirituality.*

**Hetty Einzig. Former Research & Development Director
Parenting Education and Support Forum**



Major challenges we now face

To date (2016), almost everything has been gifted to *Right from the Start* – to cover the Charity's running costs, the publishing and promotion of the first three paperbacks in the series and the first e-book.

We are now facing an entirely new situation where we must soon find:

- A new Chief Executive who is already involved in and passionate about this wide-ranging field of child care and who has solid business and promotional experience (possibly for 2-3 years only while a possible merger is negotiated with a larger charity with similar concerns).
- The part-time salary for this new Chief Executive
- Authors/contributors/photographers/artists to help us complete the rest of the books in the over-arching series.

These are the books still waiting to be finalised, edited and published as soon as we have the funding to do so:

- ***Stillness, Imagination and Meditation for Children***

Helping children to develop their inner life and to realise their power to love, to give comfort and to create beauty. Healing through meditation and art.

- ***Touch, Massage and Movement*** - Deepening the connection with children

Answering the universal hunger for touch, from baby massage and baby yoga to the benefits of peer massage in primary school. Understanding how movement, rhythm and music contribute to healthy and balanced brain development and therefore a child's capacity to build warm and lasting relationships - and to learn.

- ***Playing for Life*** - *Protecting children from hurtful influences and violence*

A child's need to play, in different ways, from birth onwards. The encouragement that parents can give to help a child learn to look, listen and use their imagination; also to cope well with difficulties and grow up understanding, confident and optimistic

- ***Happier, Calming Parenting*** - less trouble, blame and punishment.

Children behave well when they feel loved, supported and secure.

Demonstrating and helping them to grow in empathy, especially towards other children, to make amends, to learn the skills of conflict solving when things go wrong and about thoughtfulness, forgiveness and compassion. Setting firm boundaries. Being consistent. Encouraging children's confidence and self-control from the beginning.

➤ ***Children and The Natural World*** - *the enchantment that feeds the human spirit*

Ways to encourage children's understanding, enjoyment and care of the natural world, especially screen addicted and city children. Increasing children's sense of connection to all living creatures, interest and affection for them and a sense of belonging and responsibility.

➤ ***Rainbow Colours*** - *a source of children's energy and contentment*

Sharing knowledge about daylight and darkness and the physical and psychological energy and effect of different colours. Using this knowledge to help children's concentration, composure and happiness and to reduce their feelings of threat and helplessness.

➤ ***Inside Out. A book about disablement for all children, their parents, grandparents and their teachers***

Understanding different kinds of disablement (special needs) and developing strategies to encourage understanding and greater sharing and support within families, neighbourhoods and the local community (including primary schools). Helping children over the fear- and -uncertainty barrier.

➤ ***Your Life. My Life*** - For 8-10 year olds.

This book was published many years ago as a forerunner to the whole Project. It was the best selling book in the Peace Education Centre in Belfast and was translated and sold in many countries. It now needs to be radically re-written and updated.

Please contact me, Sarah Woodhouse, via the website if there is any particular way you would like to be involved in *Right from the Start*.