

1 Parental Love -Irreplaceable for Children's Well-Being

2 Satu Uusiautti¹, Dr. Kaarina MAAttA² and Satu Uusiautti³

3 ¹ University of Lapland, Finland.

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5

6 **Abstract**

7 Child rearing has become challenging during past years and great expectations are placed for
8 parenthood. Although the public upbringing has become professionalized and the day-care and
9 school services are available in today's society, parents have the main responsibility for rearing
10 children. How and into what should children be raised? In this article, good parenthood is
11 paralleled with parental love. As a result, two valuable and demanding underlying contents of
12 parental love are discussed in this article: setting up safe boundaries and constructing good
13 self-esteem as the core of good parenthood and parental love. The perspective in this article is
14 fundamentally positive: parental love appreciates and cares about the child and does not
15 abandon the child even when his/her behavior causes disappointments and trouble.

16

17 **Index terms**— Parental love, rearing, parenting styles, parenthood.

18 **1 I. Introduction**

19 Child rearing has become more and more challenging during the past few years and increasingly greater expectations
20 are leveled at educators and parents. There has been a dramatic decrease in the traditional families while the
21 proportion of single-parent families has increased (e.g. Sheridan & Burt, 2009). As the worldwide statistic show,
22 number of working mothers of young children has risen over the past few decades, so has the use of child care
23 (Ebbeck & Hoi Yin, 2009).

24 Not only the basic structure but also child care has changed dramatically. In developed countries such as
25 Finland (the authors' home country), both parents of the vast majority of families with children under school age
26 are in full-time employment. Most mothers of small children also work full-time. Under these circumstances, a
27 reliable, safe and reasonably priced day-care system is of vital importance. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health,
28 2006.) Finland uses the Nordic Welfare state principles and methods which are based on the state's responsibility
29 for its citizens. Thus, welfare services, such as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), are arranged and
30 funded by central and local government. All children below school age are entitled to receive municipal day-
31 care. (Heinämäki, 2008.) The above-mentioned services are important as female labor force participation in
32 Finland is 72 % of women (15-64 years), 18.2% of whom are in part-time employment. Furthermore, labor force
33 participation rate of women with a child(ren) under 6 years was 49.6 %, of whom 8% work part-time. ??OECD,
34 2006.) Along with the changes in working life, the role of day-care centers and schools in rearing has strengthened.
35 The rearing task has become professionalized (Bimbi, 1992) and from the parents' point of view, parenthood can
36 be considered shared with the public rearing institution (Björnberg, 1992).

37 Professionals define what is good child rearing and what kind of rearing should be implemented inside citizens'
38 homes. Yet, parents have the main responsibility for rearing their children—even though today's common discourse
39 reveal how parents seem to carry unreasonable load of guilt and consider themselves insufficient in their rearing
40 and parenting task. In Finland, work was valued as the most important thing in life-over family life and free
41 time in the 1970s. After the middle of the 1980s, the appreciations have started to change considerably in the
42 opposite direction (Maljojoki, 1989). The value of upbringing is unquestionable; actually, it seems that the
43 modern children would need parental love and the safety provided at home maybe more than ever before. Still,
44 it is worth remembering that as mothers work increasingly outside home (Aryee, Shirinivas, & Hoon Tan, 2005),

1 I. INTRODUCTION

45 men have started to use more and more time with home craft and childcare during the past decades (Barnett,
46 These decisions concerning work-family balance are not just about making compromises (e.g. Uusiautti
47 & Määttä, 2010) but, for example, positive paternal involvement influences positively the multiple domains of
48 children's lives from birth through adolescence ??Hawkins, Brown, Osterle, Arthus, Abbot, & Catalano, 2008).
49 All in all, children's well-being and health are developed within the context of the family (Ambert, 1994;Arendell,
50 1997;Sheridan & Burt, 2009).

51 The social nets around families have become scarcer. For example, migration from countryside to cities is
52 one reason for the disappearance of support nets. Previously, grandparents and relatives gave the advice and
53 instructions needed, and participated in rearing jointly and severally. Today, professional educators have replaced
54 them. (Cutting, 1998.) Although professional educators do offer their support for parents, the transition of the
55 responsibility of rearing partly outside home increases parents' insecurity every now and then: according to Bimbi
56 (1992), parents seemingly consider themselves incompetent compared with professional educators.

57 According to Huttunen's (1984) perception, parents have knowledge about rearing but when applying it they
58 experience insecurity and need support, backing up and understanding in their parenthood. Furthermore, Puroila
59 (1996) points out that parents get plenty of information about their children and the factors related to their
60 development. This information increases parents' awareness of their own rights. On the other hand, the received
61 information may be inconsistent and cause uncertainty among parents. Dencik (1989) referred to doubletendency
62 which is considered typical of modern parenthood. On the one hand, it means a strong engagement to children
63 and on the other hand giving up the rearing task. Parents are more sensitive than before and more willing to
64 realize children's needs. However, parents are uncertain of how they should fulfill their rearing task.

65 In the society of rapid change, the future of the next generation is likely to differ from the present. Thus, it
66 may not be appropriate to demand a child to follow behavior models that lose their significance in future. Parents
67 have to give up the rearing model they have gotten from their own parents and solve the challenges of rearing
68 by themselves. (Björnberg, 1992.) The fast speed of change causes uncertainty about the norms and what kind
69 of rearing is the best for children (Lahikainen & Strandell, 1987).

70 Nowadays, the science of education is studied more than ever and parents are increasingly aware of the
71 significance of their rearing task. Still, they are more and more in doubt about it as the behavioral problems of
72 the young increases. (Määttä, 2007.) Continuously increasing knowledge about the needs of child development
73 and the importance of right rearing methods means simultaneously an increase in the parents' responsibility and
74 tasks (Beck-Gernheim, 1992).

75 Related issues, such as economic aspects, time-management, the division of domestic labor, the profession-
76 alization of upbringing, have been discussed to a great extent (e.g. Clark, 2000;Frisco & Williams, 2003;Frone,
77 2003). Yet, the fundamental question-namely the one concerning parental love and the meaning of positive
78 mental growing environment-is worth contemplating as well.

79 In this article, we concentrate on analyzing the core of good parenthood. What is the goal of upbringing and
80 parents' task when the responsibility of rearing is shared with many educational institutions and professionals?
81 Parenthood is not a profession but based on parental love. What does parental love mean fundamentally? At their
82 best, upbringing and parental love offer a positive environment that enhances children's strengths. According
83 to Sheridan and Burt (2009), understanding the qualities of families and their environments that might explain
84 why some children and families fare better than others is important. We will study the concept and purpose of
85 parental love.

86 Our survey is based on the existing literature and the most recent studies as well as our extensive research
87 on love and its various forms (Määttä, 2007 with a positive approach we put the focus on how to support the
88 development of human strengths in early childhood. We also try to strengthen the role of parenthood and its
89 primary importance for a growing human being. Parenthood cannot disappear from the core of children's life.

90 II. The Purpose of Parental Love : How Should be Children Raised?

91 We start by dissecting what human characteristics are the most important for children's well-being and favor-
92 able development. Healthy selfconfidence and self-esteem, balanced emotional life, judgment and responsibility,
93 the ability to control one's own behavior, empathy as well as the ability to respect and appreciate other people
94 could represent such features (Määttä, 2007).

95 Therefore, those exact features could be the emphases of rearing.

96 According to broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004), the positive emotions, such as joy, interest,
97 contentment, and love, broadens an individual's thought-action repertoire: joy sparks the urge to play, interest
98 sparks the urge to explore, contentment sparks the urge to savor and integrate, and love sparks a recurring cycle
99 of each these urges within safe, close relationships. Positive emotions solve problems concerning personal growth
100 and development. Berscheid (2006) claims that understanding human behavior has suffered because of forgetting
101 the fact that people live in a net of human relationships for their entire life and that most of the behavior takes
102 place in the context of human relationships. When studying successful behavior, it is important to examine how
103 the environmental factors and the Therefore, it seems that these abilities develop in interaction with other people.
104 Children's bases and well-being thus are the responsibility of those people who live with and close to children,
105 such as parents, other immediate caregivers, teachers, and friends (Ambert, 1994;Arendell, 1997).

106 **2 Global**

107 Children's development is greatly affected by their growing surroundings (juvenile culture, media, as well as the
108 societal values and ideals) as it has been noted that childhood may be the optimal time to promote healthy
109 attitudes, behavior, adjustment, and prevention of problems by, for example, recognizing the children's strengths
110 and building on those strengths (Brown Kirschman, Johnson, Bender, & Roberts, 2009).

111 Next, we will discuss two valuable and demanding contents of rearing that can be seen lying behind the
112 previously mentioned features that enhance children's well-being and favorable development: setting up safe
113 boundaries and constructing good self-esteem. Children need the experiences of success, appreciation and
114 encouragement, but equally important is that they have distinct and safe limits. (e.g. Rantala & Määttä,
115 2011.) III. The Methods of Parental Love :

116 Encouragement and Limitations

117 Family boundaries mean that the family provides consistent supervision for the child and maintains reasonable
118 guidelines for behavior that the child can understand and achieve (see Search Institute, 2010). Beneficial
119 development is secured by establishing boundaries that are preserved with love instead of discipline, ignorance,
120 underestimation, mocking, or malignancy. What the rules are is entirely up to parents and other adults in the
121 household; and furthermore, parents also have to make rules how themselves will behave-consistency is needed
122 in maintenance of boundaries (Greenberg, 2003).

123 Caring and loving parents may find placing the protecting limits as well as finding the strengths to adhere to
124 them is difficult. Nor is it pleasing to let a child down by telling that he or she will not get what he or she wants.
125 If children could set the limits for themselves, rearing would be easy but growth is not that simple. Children
126 ask and they ask by their actions. Adults' task is to give answers in order to guide and protect children. (e.g.
127 Lawrence, 2001.) However, this anger does not make it justified for parents to give up their responsibility for
128 guiding the maturing people or mislead themselves into believing that it is right to give up caring. Children need
129 protecting limits and caring adults who to defy and rebel against and who they can love regardless of setbacks
130 because setting the limits creates the feeling of security and caring.

131 **3 IV. The Depth and Stability of Parental**

132 Love : Children Need to Feel Loved and Cared Even when Behaving Inappropriately

133 At home, children have to find out that they are loved and valuable even when their actions are harmful or
134 cause disappointments and shame for their parents because that is the only way of strengthening their feeling
135 of being appreciated and wanted as well as their feeling of security. They can count on parents to be there no
136 matter what happened. (Määttä, 2007.) Still, children's inappropriate behavior cannot be accepted, it has to
137 be intervened and the right direction has to be shown (e.g. ??offman & Saltzen, 1967). However, since children
138 are unready, still maturing human beings, they have to be able to trust that parents will not abandon them.
139 Children are allowed to express their bad feelings and still parents' love holds on: children need love especially
140 when they do not seem to deserve it. (e.g. Katz & Tello, 2003.) Even the disappointments are important part
141 of developing self-esteem and mental health (e.g. Desjardins, Zelenti, & Coplan, 2008). At home, children can
142 learn in a safe environment those means which help to handle disappointments and failures. When necessary,
143 parents can protect their children from the feelings of anxiety and guilt.

144 The magic word for building good self-esteem is appreciating a child. Parents' appreciative words are
145 immemorial for many children's self-esteem: "Well done, I'm happy about you," "Thank you, you know how
146 to do it," "It's magnificent how well you can do it." These acknowledging words should not be held back or
147 regulated, quite the opposite: parents should look for new chances to give appreciation and positive feedback
148 all the time. Recognition and thanks do not lose their power even when used abundantly. (see Aunola, Stattin,
149 & Nurmi, 2000.) Many parents would see their child as the best and most successful one bringing success and
150 praise. However, this kind of rearing can turn against it: instead of merciless demands for performance and
151 success, parents should emphasize humanity and(D D D D) A

152 **4 Year**

153 When defining safety limits, parents have to have the courage to face children's anger which is a normal reaction.
154 Children are displeased if not allowed to go as they will and carry out their wildest plans. goodwill in their
155 rearing. "The best is the enemy of good" -the aspiration towards perfection prevents from noticing good results
156 and tolerating the vices. Ultimately, the only right the parent has to the child is the right to love, the only task
157 is to secure the provisions for free humanity, and the only glory is the children's love. (e.g. Aunola & Nurmi,
158 2005.) The starting point and goal for rearing and parental love has to be growing child's own special value.
159 Every human being has a special value that must not be sacrificed in the name of societal effectiveness or money.
160 Every child is important, valuable, and unique regardless of how well he or she performs at school or what kind
161 of effort he or she is likely to do for the society. A child's value cannot be deduced from his or her personal
162 features.

163 Parental love gives more comprehensive support for children that the modern school or even day-care can offer
164 (Zakeri, Jowkar, & Razmjoe, 2010). Educational work carried out at day-care and school has to be appreciated
165 also by providing sufficient extrinsic circumstances to carry it out. Every child has their own strengths and

5 V. PARENTS' VERSATILE ROLES

166 parents can provide children with opportunities to succeed, thank them even for the smallest step forwards, and
167 enhance the conception of "I am able, I can, I will survive." (Harralson & Lawler, 1992.) Humanity is manifested
168 in rearing by respecting each and every child. Children should be appreciated so that they will be understood
169 and approved even when weak, maladjusted, or difficultalso when they do not meet those idealistic hopes and
170 expectations that parents, day-care, and school have set although with good intentions.

171 There are fundamental questions also because the modern society keeps up the "I'll manage alone" -ideology,
172 in other words, admires people who do not need others and cope by themselves. However, modern, almost
173 narcissistic, society and people in it are extremely vulnerable. We do not seem to tolerate or handle failures and
174 difficulties; admitting weaknesses and vulnerability are considered as giving up (Gauvain & Huard, 1999).

175 Children have to perceive that they are loved, cared, and accepted as they are-not just when they meet the
176 expectations. Only then, children can mature and develop-become free and start thinking how they would like
177 to change themselves to the directions that are possible for them.

178 5 V. Parents' Versatile Roles

179 The multidimensional contents of parental love can be viewed also by all the various roles and tasks that
180 parenthood involves. For example, Hoikkala (1993) divides parenthood into three categories: permissive,
181 responsible, and strong parenthood. Permissive parenthood emphasizes a child's individuality and its opposite
182 is a strict, dominating, and punishing parenthood. Responsible parenthood considers parenthood obligation to
183 create good growing environment for a child. The aim of this kind of parenthood is to bring up children healthy
184 and responsible citizens who take care of themselves.

185 How to secure children's favorable growth (Wolfrad, Hempel, & Miles, 2003)? The roles of parenthood,
186 according to Helminen-Iso-Heiniemi (1999) are The Teacher of Life, The Expert in Human Relationships, Love
187 Giver, Limit Setter, Caregiver (see also Hubbs-Tait, 2008;Nijhof & Engels, 2007; ??eríssimo et al., 2011). Parents
188 and other adults model self-control, social skills, engagement in learning, and healthy lifestyles (see Search
189 Institute, 2010).

190 On the other hand, children are our mirrors. Outstanding facilities or even the most advanced technology
191 does not guarantee positive development nor can one raise a child like listed company according to the indexes or
192 expectations of market economy. Every child develops at his or her own pace supported and encouraged by people
193 he or she lives with. Nothing can replace human interaction. Lawrence notes that "love which only can exist in
194 relationships is a social experience, does organize social experience, outstanding among these being commitments
195 -commitments that bind a person to a course of action and connection ??Lawrence, 2001, p. 61)." Aspinwall
196 and Staudinger (2006) point out that many of the human strengths are based on the person's relationships with
197 others, in other words, they are relational or collective by nature: for example, possibility to understand and
198 cope with various problematic life situations is better if one has a chance to discuss the problem at hand with a
199 close friend, swap opinions, and reflect the issues from the new perspectives.

200 VI. Discussion: There are no Perfect Parents -or Children

201 Parents who want to raise children well do not have to be perfect people and they cannot expect children to
202 be or become perfect either. Hardly anyone can be flawless -on the contrary: pursuing perfection prevents from
203 noticing all the good results. Alice Miller (1984) says: "Do not hope that a child would turn into something
204 specific, just that he or she would develop. Enjoy the child and his or her developmental phases as he or she is.
205 Enjoy your life together instead of being constantly worried about what your children will become or not in the
206 future." This is how a healthy selfimage is created as well as self-confidence to confront difficulties and problems
207 in life. Successful rearing does not aim at clearing the hardships and obstacles A appropriately, undertaking
208 challenging tasks, and performing activities to the best of her or his abilities (see also Search Institute, 2010).

209 When parents have faith in children's talents, it is easier for them to assure children of it as well. Certainly,
210 just belief and trust will not be enough but rearing has to be focused action: good parents are present, give time,
211 and make the effort to positive togetherness. They care, ask, discuss, listen, tell, explain, argue, fuss and busy
212 themselves with children. Good parents are role models for children even in the most difficult life situations:
213 they have to maintain the belief and pursue building better environment and more human world for children. At
214 its best, rearing helps children to experience what life can offer. They have to be allowed to see what the better
215 world could be and be assured that it is reachable.

216 Human relationships have become narrower. Even for this reason, family as a supporter of proximity and
217 individuality within the complex modern life is significant both for children and adults. The ability to be happy
218 of life and teaching it are important skills for a good parent. Being grateful for small mercies in everyday life is
219 more and more important in the insecure modern life and can be the crucial factor for children when trying to
220 handle difficulties. This kind of attitude has been described felicitously:

221 Within the prescriptive bounds of culture, families directly and indirectly encourage or discourage the active
222 pursuit of positive experience in children through the ways in which they organize children's experiences. For
223 example, whether or not parents celebrate milestones, birthdays, holidays, and accomplishments, take vacations,
224 and pursue enjoyment at work and leisure-and the specific ways in which they do so-not only teaches children the
225 value of appreciating and enjoying life, but also provides concrete models for savoring that children can imitate.
226 ??Bryant, Chadwick, & Kluwe, 2011, p. 118) Although the nature of the parent-child relationship changes
227 from early childhood to adolescence, the presence of warmth and sensitivity as well as support for autonomy as

228 parenting behaviors appears to be critical to child well-being (Sheridan & Burt, 2009). Positive caring of children
229 has positive associations with children's cognitive development and social competence during the preschool years
230 (Peisner-Feinberg, 2004). And even furthermore: positive emotions in early life have even been claimed to
231 be associated with longevity (Danner, Snowdon, & Frieser, 2001). This concerns everyone regardless of the
232 background (Peisner-Feinberg, 2004).

233 Furthermore, this complex theme can be reflected from the point of view of positively acting people. Magnusson
234 and Mahoney (2006) are interested whether the life spans of the positively functioning people differ from others
235 and if they do, what are the unique structures that express the human strength and positive ways of action in
236 their life spans, and how these structures can be recognized. The research on happiness has pointed out the
237 tendency of same kind: in order to know why some people are happier than others, we have to understand
238 what are the cognitive and motivational processes that maintain or even increase happiness and positive attitude
239 (Lyubomirsky, 2001; Ojanen, 2001). Everything begins in infancy and childhood. According to Lawrence (2001),
240 the earliest sense of a "true self" is for the infant a self "worthy of love". Through the abovementioned perception,
a child finds the world interesting and enjoyable, and feels that he or she has a positive place in it. ^{1 2 3 4 5 6}



Figure 1:

Figure 2:

241 7
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⁴Yearbut helping children to learn to confront, tolerate, and conquering the inevitable difficulties(Mcree & Halpern, 2010). Parents, caregivers, and teachers encourage and have to support the child in behaving

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