

INTRODUCTION

Without a doubt, the most enjoyable and satisfying aspect of my work as a pediatrician is counseling new parents in the care of their precious newborns. I tell them, “There is no such thing as a ‘dumb question.’ If it is on your mind, *ask it.*” This is important because there is so much information out there on parenting. Sources once were limited to relatives, particularly grandparents. Now, there is an abundance of sources, including the Internet, social media, an endless supply of parenting books, and advice from friends who can’t resist telling their stories. While the support is appreciated, the messages to these young parents can be conflicting and confusing. So, I tell them to ask whatever is on their minds.

In writing this book, my desire is to answer your questions as well, and to provide you with reliable advice on the rearing of your child. I do not claim to have all the answers, or even the only answers, to questions you may have or challenges you will encounter. But with over thirty years of pediatric practice, the wonderful experience of rearing five children alongside my dedicated wife, Nancy, and the knowledge gained from years of studying parenting literature, I have advice to offer you—advice that may allow you an easier and more productive path than I experienced as a parent. Advice that has been time-tested. Advice that can benefit your children as you *lead* them to become healthy, responsible, happy adults.

This book is a product of over thirty years of contemplating the challenges of child rearing. It began in the nineties with my participation in the national debate over the use of punishment with child discipline, progressed to a focus on the benefits of sleep training, and then culminated in the deeper investigation of authoritative parenting—the most optimal, research-proven style of parenting. Through it all, I have realized that the most successful parents *lead* their children to healthy and responsible living rather than *follow* them in pursuit of happiness.

You may ask, “Why lead?” Lead because children do not naturally know what is best for them, their health, or their interaction with others. Here are a few areas in life where children need guidance:

- Sleep: As early as the first year of life, infants need their parents to help them be good sleepers, teaching them when to sleep and how to achieve deep sleep.
- Nutrition: As early as the second year of life, children need their parents to guide them in healthy eating, avoiding the tendency to just offer them whatever they are willing to eat.
- Exercise: As early as toddlerhood, children need a gentle push to be active and self-entertaining, because the temptation to stay indoors and play with electronic devices will intensify as they grow.
- Behavior: As early as the second year of life, toddlers need their parents' leadership to know what proper behavior is and the importance of denying their selfish tendency to please themselves.
- Encouragement: As early as the first days of life, newborns need their parents to show that they love them with encouraging words, facial expressions, and physical hugs and kisses.

Parents need to love their children by leading them, which will build the invaluable parent-child relationship that ultimately determines the effectiveness of all future parenting efforts. At times this will require sacrificial leadership, where parents must deny their own desires and comfort for the sake of their child.

This book is my call to action for all parents: *Lead* your child to good health and high character. In doing so, you will produce a genuinely happy child, who is comfortable with himself, confident in his talents, compassionate toward others, and ultimately competent in his vocation.

How to Use This Book

Loving by Leading is a practical manual of opportunities for you to lead your child. It is not intended to be a comprehensive compendium addressing every aspect of parenting. Also, the methods and solutions offered are not absolutely required to have success with your child, nor are they the only way to achieve success. They may be modified and customized to fit your unique child and family setting.

This book is uniquely divided into two parts.

- Part One (chapters 1–9) explores why children need their parents to lead them.

- Part Two (chapters 10–21) offers parents practical suggestions in how to lead. This section is divided by the particular areas of parenting—sleep, nutrition, exercise, behavior, and encouragement—and is then further divided by the age of the child.

For example, if two-year-old Johnny seems to be throwing a tantrum every hour of his waking day, you can reference the first section to understand why he is behaving this way. Then turn to the Behavior section in Part Two to discover how to lead him to better behavior and self-control. You can also use the Topical Table of Contents at the end of this book (page 273) to search for specific topics and subtopics.

The focus of this book is on the first ten years of your child's life, especially birth to five years, which is a formative time of life. My intention is to help you build a basic and effective style of parenting that will allow you to reach your child's heart—the core of his emotions, motivations, values, and personality—and to build his character and competency. While your child is young, if you train him to sleep better, eat better, play better, work better, cooperate better, and to do all with a loving respect for you as his parent, then later, during his school-age and teenage years, he will be more teachable and receptive to your instruction. If this foundation of health and respect is ignored when your child is young, then it will be harder to lead him toward acquiring a mature heart later.



It is my hope that this book will serve as a helpful resource for you as your child grows and matures. And if you are picking this book up for the first time with an older child, the advice can still be very useful. It is never

too late to begin leading your child to good health and high character. So, enjoy the journey of parenting your child. It can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life!

For more details and discussion of parenting, visit LovingbyLeading.com. Research supporting the theme of this book can be found on this website.

Part One

LOVING BY LEADING YOUR CHILD: WHY?



Chapter 1

WHO'S LEADING?



At two years of age, Colton was a cyclone of energy and chaos. For the first six months he had been an easy-going child, cooing, smiling, and sleeping well. But then he began waking in the night for no apparent reason and rarely took a nap during the day. His blissfulness turned to crankiness as he fought sleep at every turn. Not knowing what to do, his parents resorted to giving him whatever he wanted, just to keep the peace.

Colton's behavior grew worse after his first birthday, and he began having tantrums at home, in restaurants, and at the grocery store. His parents were often paralyzed by his protests. The only relief came when they gave in to his demands—a snack between meals, getting out of bed when he didn't want to sleep, throwing food from the table if he didn't like what was offered, and playing with cell phones when he wouldn't settle down in public. But the relief was always and only momentary; it was just a matter of time until the next tantrum. The evenings brought no respite, with battles over bedtime leading to late nights and eventual success—on Colton's terms, sleeping in his parents' bed rather than his. Nestled restlessly between them, Colton would often wake in the night making requests for food or drink followed by cranky negotiations to get him back to bed. His parents were exhausted!

What had gone wrong? Did Colton have a sleep dysfunction, a behavioral disorder, or some other issue that required medical attention?

Many parents can identify with the desperation Colton's parents felt and have the same longing to find answers. In my experience, the primary problem behind this all-too-common scenario is an incorrect perception of child-rearing and a lack of leadership by the parents.

What has happened, and why?

The general approach to raising children has changed significantly over the past half-century. With modernization and the development of technology, American families have become more productive and more efficient in their work. Initially, these advancements came with the promise that families would have more time to spend with one another. Ironically, the opposite has occurred. Because we can accomplish more with our time, we attempt more. This has led to hectic lives for parents who are actually spending less time with their children than ever before. Additionally, the very technology that has allowed these advancements has become a major distraction. Increased screen time, for children and adults, is fracturing our relationships.

Social scientists have further complicated parenting by proclaiming that children do not need comprehensive leadership from their parents as once believed. According to this way of thinking, children will eventually chart the best course for their lives if left to their own persuasions. Today, it is commonly accepted that children only need freedom to be themselves, express themselves, and to learn by exploring. Couple this belief with busyness and distraction, and you have a recipe for a whole new approach to parenting: children lead, parents follow.

This is where we currently stand as a culture, and the emerging results of this approach are proving disastrous for both children and their parents.

In his book, *The Collapse of Parenting*, Dr. Leonard Sax describes the situation this way:

Many parents are afraid of seeming too dictatorial, and end up abdicating their authority rather than taking a stand with their own children. If kids refuse to eat anything green and demand pizza instead, some parents give in, inadvertently raising children who are more likely to become obese. If children are given smartphones and allowed to spend the bulk of their free time texting, playing video games, and surfing the Internet, they become increasingly reliant on peers and the media for guidance on how to live, rather than looking to their parents. And if they won't sit still in class or listen to adults, they're often prescribed medication, a quick fix that actually undermines their self-control. In short, parents are failing to prioritize the parent-child relationship above all other relationships. The

result is children who have no absolute standard of right and wrong, who lack discipline, and who look to their peers and the Internet for direction, instead of looking to their parents.¹

Children, such as Colton, desperately need guidance from their parents, and they generally want it, even if it sometimes causes a battle of wills. To indulge children by letting them make all the decisions puts them in a position of leadership that they are not equipped to handle. Most children do not know what is best for them and, when given the opportunity, will make unhealthy choices based on selfish intentions. The ideal goal of parenting is character building and good health; these can only come when parents lead and children follow.

By *leading* your child to better life habits, you are not only improving his health, but more importantly you are equipping him to learn self-control and to be more thoughtful in his actions and choices. This results in skills that are foundational to success in life.

For example, when parents lead a toddler to becoming a better sleeper and eater, the toddler will find it easier to control his impulses. A well-rested child is more receptive to his parents' efforts to teach him respect and submission to authority. When a child learns to submit to his parents' loving leadership, less conflict occurs, harmony prevails, and the parent-child relationship is greatly enhanced. Everyone in the family benefits when you *lead* rather than *follow* your child. (The technical term for this style of parenting is *authoritative* parenting, which we will take a closer look at in the coming chapters.)

Some will rightly point out that allowing a child to participate in some decision-making can build competence and confidence. However, when this is introduced too early or allowed too often, it can create anxiety in the heart of the child. For example, two-year-olds need clear guidance in their daily wardrobe selection, foods served, amount of television watched, and designated bedtime. Their participation can be occasionally allowed and even encouraged, but when constantly called upon to make choices beyond their capacity, they often become apprehensive and fearful of failure.

Parents need a confident understanding of *how* to lead their children at the various stages of development. In the following chapters, I will attempt to provide this understanding by looking at the styles of parenting, the nature of the child, and the need for discipline. Then, by age group, we will look at practical ways you can lead your child.

Why are some parents reluctant to lead?

If leadership in parenting is so important and rewarding, why don't more parents take this approach to child rearing? Good question. Here are some possible reasons.

1. Misled by the Parenting Media. Authoritative parenting has lost its appeal. Parents are being increasingly convinced that children do not need authoritative direction in their lives. They have been led to believe they are helping their child by taking a permissive approach and giving the child unlimited freedoms.

2. Paralyzed by uncertainty. Parents are just not sure what is best for their children, or are uncertain how to guide and correct, so they adopt a follow-the-child approach by default. In many ways, this seems to be the more efficient approach in the moment.

3. Seeking to be friends too early. It is natural for parents to desire a harmonious friendship with their child, but a respectful parent-child relationship must come first. Young children are afflicted with self-centeredness and in desperate need of their parent's guidance to develop healthy social skills. Parents must assume an authoritative role when their children are young, and allow the role to change as the child matures. This process cannot be rushed, however. Affirm and correct a child while he is young, and your relationship with him will grow into a healthy respectful friendship later in life. Resist letting your desire to please your child govern your relationship.

4. Thinking their role is to be “happiness fairies.” True happiness cannot be accomplished by simply meeting a child's every demand. This is a difficult concept for young parents to grasp. Because children don't always *want* what they *need*, or *need* what they *want*, parental wisdom must come in play. Making the call to deny a child his desires—and enduring the protest—is a small price to pay for the long-term benefits he will enjoy.

5. Desiring to avoid conflict with their child. Every parent wants to maintain a peaceful, pleasant relationship with their children. However, when this desire causes them to ignore the child's need for discipline and leadership, the parent will often resort to compromise and excessive, unreasonable

negotiation with the child. This approach of postponing correction inevitably leads to parental outbursts and child exasperation. Conflict avoidance is a short-term solution that leads to a long-term problem.

6. Hoping someone else will train their child. In the hurriedness of life, many parents hope that the daycare or sitter will do the dirty work of child discipline for them, when in fact only the parent has the true authority and influence to correct and lead.

7. Too busy to invest the time needed. Life's many distractions are tempting. Even after a full day at work, there are many things competing for our attention: social events, child activities, church gatherings, social media, or simply recreational screen time. Productive parenting requires the intentional investment of contemplation and time. Don't let the demands of life distract you from this important task. Invest now, and enjoy the fruit of your efforts later. Delay, and you will likely see less fruit and more heartache.

Perhaps you can identify to some degree with one or more of these reasons. I have listed these not to create guilt, but to help you recognize any obstacles and then help you focus on overcoming them.

To that end, I add this note: While a good outcome with your children cannot be guaranteed if you lead well, a bad outcome is much more likely if you don't.