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| by Melissa Chianta

fêting the heart

Media for fostering trust,
compassion, and creativity in
families and communities



One of the foundations of attachment parenting is responding to children's needs with empathy. A potent social skill, empathy creates better relationships not only with kids, but with partners, friends, and neighbors. It's also an important element of many acts of social change, as is made evident in several of the books featured in this review. The most obvious example of this is the work of Mary Gordon, whose school programs, detailed in her book *Roots of Empathy*, empower kids to treat each other and themselves with kindness and respect. Empathy is also a core component of William Stillman's advocacy for those with autism spectrum disorders. Author of *Empowered Autism Parenting*, Stillman draws on his own experience of living with Asperger's syndrome to establish bonds with those whom many assume are incapable of connection. Herb Kohl, author of *The Herb Kohl Reader*, has accomplished a similar feat: educating the many labeled "unable to learn." His secret? In part, simply remembering what it was like to be a child. Read on to find out more about the books by these remarkable people, along with those of others who shed light on how to create peaceful, healthy families and communities.

Helping Baby Sleep: The Science and Practice of Gentle Bedtime Parenting, by Anni Gethin, PhD, and Beth Macgregor, is an excellent attachment-parenting guide to regulating little ones' sleep without making them "cry it out." The authors' research-based arguments assert that responding to babies' nighttime needs actually contributes to the development of their brains, while "sleep-training" programs harm neurological growth. They outline straightforward solutions for common sleep issues, as well as ideas for self-care. (Celestial Arts, 2009)

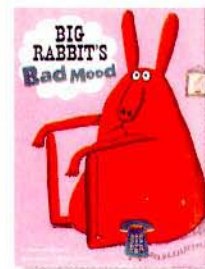
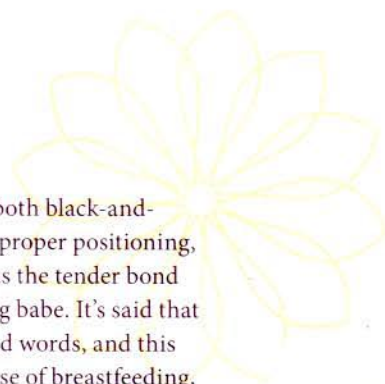
In *Breastfeeding with Comfort and Joy: A Photographic Guide for Mom and Those Who Help Her*, Laura Keegan, RN, FNP, combines sound lactation instruction with evocative, beautifully

composed photographs, in both black-and-white and color, that depict proper positioning, holds, and posture, as well as the tender bond between mother and nursing babe. It's said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and this is particularly true in the case of breastfeeding, making this book all the more valuable. (Lifeforce Family Health Care, 2008; www.lifeforcefamilyhealth.com/breastfeeding_book.htm)

Mary Gordon's *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child* outlines the author's exceptional program for helping at-risk elementary and even high school students learn to think about how others feel. Gordon's magic ingredient? Babies. In her program, a mother-infant pair visits a classroom once a month so that students can become familiar with babies' many needs and witness how a responsive mother appropriately attends to them. For abused and otherwise attachment-deprived kids, watching this mother-infant exchange can prove a revelation that, with coaching, may facilitate marked changes in their behavior. I think it's a brilliant idea—and with *Roots of Empathy* programs now in New Zealand, Australia, the US, Canada, and Japan, it's evidently a successful one. (The Experiment, 2009; www.rootsofempathy.org)

In *The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success*, Charlotte Reznick, PhD, offers practical, easy-to-implement guided visualizations and breathing exercises that help children to tap into their intuition for the purpose of easing their emotional and physical pain. Grounded, accessible, and not the least bit woo-woo, this book is a boon for anyone seeking to help soothe a child's fear and worry. (Perigee, 2009)

Empowered Autism Parenting: Celebrating (and Defending) Your Child's Place in the World, by William Stillman, should be on the bookshelf of anyone, parent or professional, who works with people with autism spectrum disorders.



Opposite page: Illustration by Delphine Durand from *Big Rabbit's Bad Mood*