

## An Ethic Rooted in Deep Caring

**Ethics:** A philosophical or theological theory of moral attitudes, values, and norms.

**Ethic:** A basic human moral attitude—a way of being in the world connected so deeply and pervasively to the whole of our humanity that there is no need to impose it, regulate it, or enforce it.

Teaching our children to think and act ethically is three fold:

1. Giving them ways to care deeply, share generously, and help willingly.
2. Curb their inclinations to hoard or harm.
3. Stop in its tracks anything that fuels hatred.

It is in us to care—we are as capable of being good as we are of doing harm. Deep caring is a matter of common decency in the moment.

An ethic rooted in deep caring is primarily about relationships. Principles, virtues and values are in the service to and at the service of that caring

Principles, rules, and dogma can be used for good or for ill—prevent ethical abuses or serve as the excuse for them; contribute to the breakdown of we into us and them, good people versus bad people, the saved and the damned.

Rigid moral absolutism requires an always and never, rigid adherence to rules, principles and dogma. Deep caring involves a must.

Knowing when to set aside principles, rules or dogma involves using our head, our heart, and our messy emotions and instincts

The story about our human nature in today's social and cultural climate is part and parcel of our human nature and our social and cultural climate.

Our story is also guided by our compassion and loving kindness, which recognizes that there is no **I** without a **Thou**, no **We** without **Community** and no way to survive without honoring both our unique individuality and our common humanity.



**Hating, hoarding, and harming** are the three virulent agents that can rip apart the fabric of human relationships. They destroy our sense of community, our solidarity with one another, and our self-respect. The **I** and **Thou** and **We** are rendered null and void.

### Compassion and Loving Kindness

Altruistic emotions that involve both strong feelings and the intellect, and can rise above more basic feelings, moods, and thoughts that might affect our inclination to help

Compassion is a sympathetic consciousness of another's sorrow, pain, or misery, together with the deep passion to alleviate it. To act compassionately is to connect **I** and **Thou**.

Loving-kindness is the desire to extend care, consideration, and goodwill to each and everyone we meet.

**Empathy** implies resonance, emotional contagion—echo or amplify another's feelings.

**Sympathy** implies responsiveness—respond to another, our feelings in harmony with the other but not the same.

Empathy and sympathy can be corrupted, perverted, or negated.

## The Head, The Heart, and Those Messy Emotions and Instincts

Ignorance=I don't know

Apathy=I don't care

The role of the mind is to inform the heart, it cannot create caring.

Moral ideas don't necessary lead to moral actions. The mind can construct ways to harm others, to justify bigotry and rationalize prejudice, to validate bias and discrimination.

Knowledge that is not at the service of deep caring is of no service to humanity.

The mind can be used to imagine good, to discern the right thing to do, to take the perspective of another, to see the larger picture, to work through moral issues, to help make moral judgments, and to figure out a better way.

To care deeply is to act out of deep affection and regard for the weal and woe of the other. To care without reflection or perspective taking can result in being unable to respond effectively to the weal and woe of another. Being conscious of differences but ignorant of commonalities, children can care deeply about those in their tight circle of concern and fearful of 'outsiders.'

Feelings are not good or bad, they are real—vital to our ability to connect with one another and to relate effectively and affectively with the world.

Nurturing parents regularly do five things:

1. Acknowledge, own and label feelings.
2. Admit anger, or hurt, or fear, and then do something responsible and purposeful to address those feelings.
3. Make assertive statements.
4. Acknowledge that children's feelings are real and legitimate without passing judgment on those feelings.
5. Teach children to handle their own feelings assertively.



Our **instinct to mimic** (or catch) all types of emotions provides the foundation to be able to resonate with and understand someone else's feelings.

**Big I and Three C's**—Intent, content, circumstances, and possible intended and unintended consequences

If we conclude that our actions could harm another person and we commence to act, we come full circle to our intent to harm.

If we conclude that our actions could help relieve the suffering of the other, we have three choices: to not act (allow suffering); to act because we want to maintain our image as a caring person (get caught); or to act to relieve the suffering of others, because we must.

#### Why Can't I?

1. It is unkind.
2. It is hurtful.
3. It is unfair.
4. It is dishonest.

#### Our Worldview and Why it Matters

The three kinds of families metaphorically symbolize our worldview. They provide a set of assumption about human nature that informs our way of being in the world.

Neither a rigid moral absolutism (Because I said so...) nor shifting moral relativism (As long as I don't get caught...) will teach children how to care deeply, share generously, or help willingly. Neither do they provide the groundwork necessary to develop communities that will support, not destroy, that which nurtures children's innate ability to care.

#### Hoarding, Harming: Betraying Ourselves and Our Circle of Caring

Hoarding and harming cause hurt, but they are not necessarily acts of cruelty or evil in and of themselves. The consequences of hoarding and harming can be both mean and cruel. Both hoarding and harming can be called into the service of hate to further evil. Hoarding and harming create cracks in our solidarity with one another.

**Hoarding** is about me, mine, and more—to the detriment of us, ours, and enough.

Becoming more isolated, self-centered, and competitive as they accumulate more gadgets around them, children are losing opportunities to care and share, solve problems collaboratively, and simply play together. When they are greedy, they are never contented, never satisfied, and always afraid there will not be enough.

**Harm—the betrayal of trust.** When a trust is betrayed, the ties that bind us together are tattered and severed.

Disagreements and conflicts happen within the bonds of relationships. They are normal, natural, and necessary. Lying, cheating, and stealing can rip apart those bonds.

**Lying, cheating, and stealing** are truth and honesty's hollow imposters cloaked in any number of disguises: deceptions, half-truths, and the absence of truth.

Reason not to lie, cheat, and steal:

1. To keep one's integrity (**I**).
2. To maintain and strengthen the bond with another (**Thou**).
3. To live in a peaceful and just community (**We**).

The more children anchor their actions in deep caring for themselves and others, the less likely they will be to succumb to the lure of these three thieves that rob them of their own integrity and their relationship with others.

Holding children accountable for what they do that causes harm, what they fail to do to care, and for what they turn a blind eye to says we care deeply about them. It also says that we believe they are capable of acting with integrity, civility and compassion. That will require resolve on our part and discipline on theirs.

#### Lies

Lies are the absence of truth and they wear many guises: spoken, bald faced lies; acts of commission; acts of omission; and deception. (Different from the "suspension of reality" in fantasy and fiction.)

Children lie to cover up what they have done or what was done to them; to avoid doing something; to deny responsibility for mischief; or to cover up another deception.

Far more than teaching children merely not to lie, we need to teach them to be kind with their words, truthful, and trustworthy.

#### Hating: Evil in Action

Hate is not the opposite of deep caring; it is the absence of deep caring. It can appear in different forms—as contempt, bigotry, degradation, exclusion, revenge, or bullying.

#### Nonviolence As A Way Of Life

Our children must see us as more than non-bigoted, non-racist, or non-sexist. We must show them that we are anti-bigoted, anti-racist, anti-sexist, actively involved in our community working against such intolerance and hatred and standing up for social justice.

#### What's Forgiveness Got to Do with It?

Forgiveness is not a verb, nor is it an act of the will. It is the voice of the heart that speaks in the presence of the soul. It is holding onto one's "caring self." It is heart-business—the choice to not be bound up in revenge and hatred—the mind will be busy enough working out ways to demonstrate the forgiveness through feelings, deeds, actions, possibly releasing the debt, and making real other tangible expressions of that forgiveness.

The act of forgiveness is an act of radical self-interest—to be open to life again, to learn to trust again, and to treat all whom they meet with integrity, civility, and compassion.

Excerpts from *Just Because It's Not Wrong Doesn't Make It Right*, Barbara Coloroso

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## Media: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly, and the Indifferent

Media *can* be used as an international educator, as a way to tune into the world, and provide a way to tune out for a brief respite from everyday life and demands.

Too much media involvement and too little real life social interaction and engagement stifle the development of social skills necessary to form healthy relationships.

Caring deeply, sharing generously, and helping willingly are butting up against the messages of materialism, self-centered gratification, and gratuitous violence, (often combined with sex), as well as unhealthy attitudes about girls and women (denigration and subjugation) and about relationships.

Many popular shows, movies, songs, and videos promote “no limits, no boundaries, if it feels good, do it” ethics.

Difficult moral dilemmas and everyday decisions are lumped together as just some of life choices you get to make.

People are divided into the bad and the good—they and us. Various minority groups are portrayed in stereotypical fashion, and often in a negative light—not one of us.

There is no correlation between real-life violence and unreal media violence. There are often no negative consequences for perpetrators of violent acts. If the perpetrator is viewed as a “good guy,” violence is actually cheered and rewarded; rarely is remorse shown.

### Not Exactly the Sound of Music

Music is a form of communication that comes before and transcends spoken language. Musical games help children learn rudimentary social skills.

Music can call forth powerful memories; convey powerful emotional meaning to thoughts or actions that have no direct correlation to the music itself.



Music can be used as the cord that connects and binds people to one another and can be used for good or bad:

1. Help solidify a group, create a deep sense of community, and join people together for the benefit of that community.
2. Help solidify a group to work against the common good of the larger community, or energize them to attack a group targeted for exclusion or harm.

### Video Games—Fun Fantasy, Fear and Hate

Possible positives:

1. Draw kids into an intricate system where they learn the rules by interacting with fantasy characters and other real life players.
2. Strengthened hand-eye coordination, quick thinking, cooperation, imagination, and problem solving skills.
3. Invite kids to create thoughtful and caring solutions to quandaries and dilemmas. (SimCity)

Probable negatives:

1. Require little more than quick aggressive, violent responses to perceived threats.
2. Glorifies violence as the legitimate solution to problems.
3. Set up other people as adversaries, prey, or targets
4. Normalizes and routinizes violence.
5. Break down natural inhibition to killing.
6. Creates neural pathways that connect violence with pleasure and rewards, (rather than with sadness, sympathy, and fright).
7. Nonstop stimulation provides comfort and becomes a source for “soothing oneself.”
8. Can be addictive.

## Internet

Connecting to the Internet is like opening the door to a new—and vast—city. Children need to be taught how to live in the Net world and navigate its roads.

If fear of getting caught is what prevents kids from lying, cheating and stealing, the anonymity and sense of invisibility created on the Net will lessen any inhibition.

An internal moral code (do the right thing because it is the right thing to do) will serve your children far better than your futile attempts to be a 24-7 monitor of Internet activities.

### Advertising and Marketing

Advertising and marketing targeting children:

1. Teach them at an early age to want more than they need, and to need more than they can possibly use—mindless spending and superficial materialism.
2. Create a false standard of beauty and strength.
3. Sexualizes young children.
4. Fashionable debasing of women’s identity—girls seen not as equals to relate to but objects to be used.

### Deadening Consequences—What’s So Wrong with All This Violence?

Everything a child is exposed to—whether real, viewed, listened to, or imagined—becomes a part of that child’s view of the world.

Real or imagined acts of violence tend to cultivate a sense of danger, mistrust, alienation, and gloom.

Children regularly exposed to media violence are apt to:

1. Become *desensitized* to real-life violence.
2. Imitate the violence they see and hear.
3. Become easily *intimidated* and *depressed*.
4. Become *fearful* and *distrustful* of others.
5. *Miss* their natural, healthy *fear clues*.
6. Be *lulled* into thinking that they are safe when in familiar surroundings with familiar people.

## What Can You Do?

1. Move the TV, computer, and DVD player into a public area of your home.
2. Listen to what your children are listening to and talk with them about the message in relation to your values and expectations.
3. Play an active role in selecting material for younger children, and teach older children to make healthy choices about media consumption.
4. Watch TV shows and movies with your children and talk with them about plot, characters, themes, intentions, and manipulative tools.
5. Go on a tour with your children of their Internet communities, and discuss together what you find there.
6. Look at advertising in all the media forms with your kids and help them learn to decipher the message and to be discerning consumers.
7. Form a movie club with other families and select, watch, and discuss movies together.
8. Be alert to the danger signs of overexposure to “uncivilizing” media.
9. Teach your children basic Net etiquette and Net safety.
10. Encourage kids to get involved with their peers in activities that promote creative, responsible, prosocial, and civil behaviors.
11. Stay involved with your children—unplug the TV, turn off the computer, confiscate the batteries to the Game Boy, and lose the headphones. Get outside and explore your neighborhood together, get involved in a community project, cruise a river, climb a rock wall, ride bikes, take a hike, share a picnic lunch, look at the stars. It’s a big galaxy out there.

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## Mistakes, Mischief, and Mayhem Revisited

How we respond to their many mistakes, occasional mischief, and rare mayhem can help provide the wherewithal for our children to become responsible, resourceful, resilient, compassionate people who feel empowered to act with integrity and a strong sense of self, or to become masters of excuses, blaming, and denial who feel powerless, manipulated, and out of control.

### Punishment and Discipline

Punishment is adult oriented, imposes power from without, arouses anger and resentment, invites more conflict, exacerbates wounds rather than heals them; is preoccupied with blame and pain; does not consider reasons or look for solutions; does something to a child; involves a strong element of judgment; and demonstrates a parent’s ability to control a child.

**Discipline** is not judgmental, arbitrary, confusing or coercive. It is not something we do to our children. It is working with them. It is a process that gives life to a child’s learning; it is restorative and invites reconciliation. Its goal is to instruct, teach, guide, and help children develop self-discipline—an ordering of the self from the inside, not imposition from the outside.

The *process* of discipline does four things the act of punishment cannot do:

1. Shows kids what they have done.
2. Gives them as much ownership of the problem as they are able to handle.
3. Gives them options for solving the problem.
4. Leaves their dignity intact.

For mistakes, mischief, or mayhem that intentionally or unintentionally create serious problems of great consequence, the **Three R’s**—restitution, resolution, and reconciliation—are incorporated into the four steps of discipline.

## Creating a Caring Community through Our Human Wisdom

A genocidal environment consists of unquestioning obedience to authority, the normalization of cruelty, and the dehumanization of people. Hate—often the cold hate of contempt—is a key ingredient. Couple that hate with hoarding and harming, and you have a recipe for the demise of community, or the annihilation of an entire group of people.

**Hate** destroys the Thou, rendering the other an It.

**Hoarding**, with its rapacious and exploitive individualism, blinds us to the needs of others and to their rightful place in a genuine community. **Harming**—lying, cheating, and stealing—violates the critical bonds of trust.

We can no longer view hatred as natural, normal or necessary; disparity in wealth as inevitable; or injustice as simply regrettable.

**Religion** is neither sufficient nor necessary to raise a moral child.

**Harm:** As much as it serves to divide us; gives people a sense of entitlement, liberty to exclude, intolerance toward differences; denies equal rights and partnership between men and women; fails to support a just economic order and basic human rights.

**Help:** In as much as it helps children to honor the **I** and **Thou**, and the **We**; validates the intrinsic dignity of each human being; affirms our solidarity and interdependence; provides rituals and ethical traditions to help develop our authentic selves in relation to a genuine community.

