

Introduction: Choosing the Child You've Been Given

Delight in Your Child's Design is intended to help you rejoice in the complexity and uniqueness of your children, understand how to deal positively with difficult differences, and find fresh ways to express love and appreciation to your kids.

At the same time, it acknowledges that much can interfere with joy-filled parenting—there are some barriers to delight that may need to be overcome. Three mothers mentioned in the introduction had shared their concerns with the author. Heather Ann longed for new ways to connect more meaningfully with her child. Pamela longed for feelings of significance after leaving a nursing career to mother her kids. Sharleen hoped for new ways to cope with her children's differing personalities.

Can you relate to any of these mothers?

What do you hope to learn most through reading this book? What issues in your family do you hope to gain insight about?

Chapter 1: Delighted or Disillusioned?

Author Laurie Winslow Sargent describes a typical day with her children, leading to conflicting feelings about parenting. Caring for kids can be physically and emotionally exhausting.

Can you share with the group a day when you felt worn out by mothering? What led up to those feelings?

Consider the five benefits to delighting more in a child. One benefit is that it can help a child feel more self-confident and secure. One child in this chapter, Cameron, felt rejected by one of his parents and wrote a poem expressing his longings.

What do you do to help your kids feel loved and accepted?

“A child who feels valued responds more positively to discipline and guidance.” Valuing a child includes understanding and accepting personality differences, while also saying *no* to misbehavior.

Have you ever noticed a decrease in difficult behavior after you have deliberately taken time to appreciate your child? For instance, after you have spent time playing with or praising your child, has he been easier to live with? Describe the circumstance.

Have one person in the group (perhaps your discussion group leader) summarize the story about Thomas Edison (“Little Al”), the goose egg, and Edison's big sister.

What does this story teach you about the power of encouraging words and about how delight in a child may impact him for life? Discuss what new words of encouragement you might offer your child this week that you might not have said lately.

Chapter 2: Tough Stuff

In the story about the young mother of preschoolers at a ballpark, we see this mother's irritation with her children. If we are honest, most of us at times overreact negatively to children's behavior when personal struggles make us oversensitive.

Can you recall a time this week when you overreacted to your child simply because you were feeling out of sorts?

Hectic schedules and sleep deprivation can decrease joy in parenting.

Can you share tips with the group to help each other enjoy your children more in the next month? Give each other permission to trim to-do lists and change some “must dos” to “can dos.” Share strategies for getting more sleep.

Choose one or more of the following bits of wisdom to discuss with the group:

- Matthew 22:39 says to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Behind that is the assumption that you cannot accept and give love to others until you appreciate yourself.
- In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul tells us to not to be anxious, reminds us to pray, and says we’ll be given a peace that is beyond human understanding.
- Second Corinthians 5:17 tells us that by allowing Christ in our lives, we become a new creation and can always start fresh.

How can the concepts in these Scriptures be applied to the “tough stuff” in your present or past?

Chapter 3: From DNA to Birth Day

In the film *A Bug’s Life*, Flik the ant reassures little Dot of his enormous potential. Then, realizing his own potential, Flik helps his entire ant community.

How do you think helping your child feel significant might cause her to make a difference in the lives of other people?

In *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, Dr. Paul Brand describes the complexity of the human body and the uniqueness of each individual. There is no one else on earth exactly like your child!

How can realizing the complexity and uniqueness of your child help you delight in him more? Can you share with the group some creative ways to remind a child how special he is?

In the *Harnicher v. University of Utah Medical Center* case, a couple claimed mental distress when one of their triplets was born with red hair instead of brown. They sued because sperm donor #183 had been confused with #83.

What thoughts or concerns do you have about how scientific advances now allow parents to choose some genetic characteristics in their children? Discuss those concerns. Share what attributes you might not have chosen but appreciate in your child.

This chapter gives some fascinating examples of what a fetus most likely hears, sees, feels, and tastes when in the womb.

How do you react to the idea that at birth your child probably already knew your voice and may even have recognized the cadence of a children’s story? Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

This chapter includes an in-depth story about a remarkable man, Bill Porter, whose determination and optimism helped him succeed in life despite the physical limitations of cerebral palsy. Was there anything about this story you found particularly striking?

How can you help instill determination and optimism in your own child? Offer tips to each other.

Chapter 4: Personality Potluck

Laurie Winslow Sargent opens this chapter by sharing some early conversations with her son Tyler as a toddler-turning-preschooler that revealed some of his strongest personality traits (a strong will, analytical thinking, and a sense of humor.)

Can you share with the group a conversation you had with your own child this week that revealed something about his or her personality? What traits did you see? Did those conversations excite or frustrate you? Describe them.

Take a close look at the “Temperament ABCs” chart. (You might consider copying this and posting it on your refrigerator at home to remind you of your child’s positive traits.)

Which traits do you recall seeing in your child frequently or strongly since she first began to walk and talk? How do you see those same traits exhibited now if she is older?

Take a look at the “Your Child’s Got Personality!” quiz. Then look at the list of four ways a child’s strongest traits will affect his choices in life: 1) how he relates to others, 2) how he deals with problems, 3) how he organizes his thoughts and carries out tasks, and 4) what interests and motivates him.

How does understanding these four things about your child help you understand him or her better?

Most of your child’s behaviors and activity choices are likely connected with her inborn traits. However, some behaviors and choices will stem from your child’s efforts to please others, including you.

How can knowing what energizes or motivates your child help you change her difficult behaviors or help you direct her into activities she enjoys most? (Consider the illustration in chapter 1 that reveals how kids respond differently to time-outs, depending on their personalities.)

Chapter 5: Clash and Burn

This chapter opens with stories revealing how personality traits that seem to be liabilities in a child can actually become valuable assets when she is older.

Do you see any traits in your child that you know may help him in a particular career or even in school when he is older?

Laurie describes five different reasons personality differences or similarities can cause conflict. One reason is described under the subheading “Opposites Don’t Always Attract.” Seven inborn traits, in particular, can frustrate or exhaust parents when their personalities are opposite from their kids’.

Review as a group those seven traits. Which personality differences pose the greatest challenges for you?

The sections “Class Conformity” and “You’re Not in Kansas Anymore” describe how personality “problems” are sometimes only problems in context. Behaviors that are non-issues at home may cause problems in Auntie’s upstairs apartment, at Grandma’s house, or at school.

How can understanding your child’s personality and needs help you be more patient in situations away from home? Can you creatively accommodate your child’s personality while also helping him fit in?

Laurie describes ten tips to help you cope when your child’s traits differ from your own or when his traits are more intense or frequent.

Which tips do you think you may be able to implement right away, and how? Which will require some work? Why is it worth it?

Chapter 6: Disability Dilemmas

This chapter includes in-depth stories from several mothers who had concerns that their children might have learning or behavioral difficulties requiring professional help. The author, drawing on her former experience working in occupational therapy, suggests several questions that parents with similar concerns can ask themselves.

In the section “What’s Wrong with Your Child?” what do we learn about how therapists might test a child and how?

In the section “The Hazards of Labeling Your Child,” six problem areas are identified. The next section, “The Helpfulness of Labeling Your Child,” includes some in-depth stories about several children with learning and social struggles. This chapter illustrates how labels can be used positively as tools to help children get professional help when needed.

Does this chapter cause you to think about labeling in a new way? How?

Often, key words used to describe learning difficulties or strong personalities—even if they don’t exactly fit your child—can help you find Internet resources, books, or articles that will help you and your child.

Can you offer the group any tips on finding helpful resources?

Intellectually gifted children (and their parents) often struggle with some of the same labeling issues parents of learning disabled kids do. (See Appendix B on intellectual giftedness.)

What similarities do you see?

Keep in mind that a child who struggles with a learning or behavioral difficulty may also be very bright, even intellectually gifted.

Has your opinion about gifted children or their parents changed after reading this chapter?

Chapter 7: Love Is a Verb

This chapter opens with a story about one remarkable family, the Murfitts, and five lessons (each subtitled “Remember . . .”) we can learn from this family.

Do any one of those five lessons strike a chord with you? Which ones, and in what way?

There are many ways you can treasure your kids. In the section “Nine More Ways to Treasure Your Kids,” one of those ways is to make a bigger effort to reveal your love for your child nonverbally.

How can you begin to implement that this week?

Take the “Strengths Test” to help you determine what gifts your child possesses. Next, consider the potential problems described in this chapter. Those include tendencies for parents to under- or over-emphasize gifts and allowing other people to dictate how a child should be nurtured. In the list of “DOs” are five ways to help your child develop and enjoy his or her strengths.

Which suggestions can you apply to your own child this month? This year?

Does the section on using words creatively (for instance, making up songs using your child’s name) or the section on appropriate touch (as in drawing alphabet letters on a small child’s back) give you any new ideas to try with your own children? Some of Laurie’s ideas may have surprised you—for instance, the “gift” of teaching your child how to earn and budget his own money.

What ideas of your own can you share with the group that help parents express love to a child?

The “Actions of Appreciation” sidebar is laid out in the form of a report card for yourself. It doesn’t hurt for us to stop periodically to assess how we are learning in the school of parenting!

In what areas do you feel successful this week? What areas need work? Offer each other encouragement and prayer support for changes, and applaud each others’ successes.

Can you finish the following sentence before you leave this book group?

“I appreciate and delight in my child because she is . . .”

If Delight in Your Child’s Design has helped you to delight more in your child in any way or stimulated questions your book group did not cover but for which you’d like answers, the author would love to hear from you. You may contact Laurie Winslow Sargent via her author Web site at www.ParentChildPlay.com.