



This Month's

# Special Feature

## The Magic of Change from Molly Koch

If parents are reading any of the good parenting books available today, (and there are hundreds to choose from) you might wonder as I do, why they haven't perfected the art of parenting by now? Why aren't the new theories, new insights, and new understandings producing a generation of healthy, productive, cooperative, happy children? And why are parents still asking the same questions I asked when I was a first-time mother back in 1948? Despite all the good information, it appears that something vital is being overlooked.

From my point of view, shaped by my many years of observation and experience as a parent-educator, the best technique cannot measure up in importance to who we are as people. What I mean is this: who we are has far more influence on children than the methods we use to discipline them. This is not to say that what we do is unimportant; it is to say that good techniques have the best results when they are in the setting of a healthy and loving relationship. Instead of asking whether this or that discipline method will work, parents would do better to pay attention to the person who is doing the disciplining. Too often, when I am asked my opinion about a particular technique, it is immediately clear that the parent is looking for a way to change her child. The best way to change a child's attitude or behavior, however, is to change our own attitudes and behaviors.

The magic comes when after we have changed ourselves, the children naturally respond in kind. None of us wants to be judged by our behavior alone—especially when we make errors in judgment, or act foolishly. Rather, we want to be accepted and loved regardless of what we do. So when we stop focusing on our children's behavior and focus instead on our relationship with them, all kinds of newness takes place in ourselves and in them. First, it results in a calm atmosphere that relieves the stress for everyone. Then when we believe in the goodness of children, their goodness emerges. And when we have faith in their ability to handle their problems, they measure up. When we show compassion for their struggles with learning how to be mindful human beings, they become mindful human beings.

Sure, we want our children to behave properly, achieve good grades, get along with siblings and peers, cooperate with household chores, and have respect for us. But when they don't fulfill our expectations, is punishment or humiliation the way to change them? Think how you would you want your boss to teach you to do your job better. I'd want my boss to have faith in my ability to perform better, I'd appreciate a clear instruction on how to do my job better, and certainly I would like to have my success acknowledged and rewarded with praise. So it is with children.

At the conclusion of one of my parent groups in a Baltimore City school, I asked the parents what it took for them to change. Two answers summed it up: it took courage to go to the group in the first place to learn new ways, because it means admitting that their present methods do not work; and it takes courage to give up old ways which are familiar, and go

forward into the unknown of new ways to discipline their children. The parents acknowledged, however, that the new ways were not only more effective, but it made them feel good about themselves! None of us enjoys yelling or hitting our children, so it is a relief to discipline children without having to feel guilty when we use harsh methods. The new ways do as much for the children's well-being as it does for the parents'.

April marks my one year anniversary of writing the Family Matters column. I hope you have enjoyed the ideas you found there. At the end of each column the editor invites you to email me any questions you'd like answered or topics you would like me to cover. So far, I have had no takers. So let me repeat the invitation. I like nothing better than to interact with people, whether through eye-to-eye contact or email. I want very much to know what you are thinking, feeling, coping with, struggling with, excited about, angry about, who you are, what you do, what interests you, what doesn't interest you, and how you manage each day's pressures. It's clear that you know much more about me than I know about you. Finding out about you would help me write on subjects that have meaning for you. So, email me, tell me something about yourself, and give me some idea as to what you would like to see in Family Matters.



*Molly Koch is a wife, mother and activist. She is the author of **27 Secrets to Raising Amazing Children**. You can find out more at her two websites, [mollybkoch.com](http://mollybkoch.com) and [keeptheconnection.org](http://keeptheconnection.org).*

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