

Part 1: A World of Consent

Most of us want parenting advice that is practical, and this book certainly aims to do that, but trying to find another way of parenting also demands that we do a bit of thinking. The way we think about our children and our relationship to them; the way we speak to and about our children, make all the difference to the way we act. To begin to find consent with our children we have to ask some previously unasked questions and take apart thoughts that we once thought were obvious or common sense.

In the first part of the book I want to introduce you to the world of consent. Firstly, I want to explore what is meant by assisting children to be free people. When I first encountered such an idea it raised my hackles; liberal I might be, but insanely negligent I was not. I thought, "So what should a parent do? Let her four year old play on the motorway because he wants to while her six year old daughter watches porn films?" I had seriously misunderstood both the idea and the practice of living by consent. A child getting what he wants is not about neglect, never making suggestions, never offering alternatives, never encouraging children to change their minds. On the other hand, neither is finding agreement and consent with children simply a ruse to get children to do what I want without having to force and cajole and fight.

Eventually, the penny dropped: compulsion really is damaging and it has to go, it was simply not the innocent parenting tool that I had always imagined it to be, no matter how subtly employed; but without this last line of defense what was I supposed to do? I needed new ideas. I needed to think again about my role as parent. I needed to think through issues of safety, protection, neglect, self-surrender and giving in as a parent. Those are the issues I'll address in chapters one and two.

For a while all went well; it was like cracking a code or buying a new pair of spectacles that make everything clear again. My thinking changed, my speech changed, my relationships changed. Unfortunately though, parents never arrive at the final destination; this is a lifetime's process of improvement, not a simple, soluble puzzle. I soon found myself hard up against deeply ingrained ideas that stopped me finding solutions and left me feeling trapped and frustrated. Why? Well, we all have our own areas of messed up thoughts and we all have certain ideas that run so deep that we find them hard even to notice, let alone criticize and change.

In chapter three I want to look more closely at the obstacles in our way; the ideas that prevent us from living by consent. These things are very personal. Most conventional parents agree that there are certain things that require compulsion, yet no one agrees about what those things are. Perhaps you have no hang ups about bed times, room tidiness, watching TV and eating sweets, but feel that the world will end if teeth are not brushed twice a day every day, so that you will compel your child if you can't convince her?

These deeply rooted ideas, which are often less than rational in the way they are thought about and expressed, rely on what the scientist Richard Dawkins has called 'memes'. Memes are ideas that reproduce themselves in much the same way as genes reproduce themselves in the biological realm. In chapter three I want to explore with you the idea of memes (no scientific knowledge needed!); what they mean for our parenting, how they might affect us and how we can change our thinking when it places obstacles in the path to living by consent. Living by consent is not a set of techniques; it is about creating a lively, problem solving where everyone is on the same side in the journey.

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Helping Children, Helping Ourselves

How is it possible to live family life without compromise? How can we always have win-win situations? How can responsible parents let go of the notion of having clear and safe rules for their children? First, we have to think that it is possible; we have to be optimists above all else.

In the film, *The Matrix*, the central character, Neo, discovers that he has been living in a world that is constructed for him, inside a fake reality that is designed to maximize the external controls imposed by the rulers. He also discovers that he can choose not to accept this version of reality. He is offered the opportunity to find out the truth of what the world is really like by making a choice between two pills. The blue pill will wipe out his memory of ever having doubts about the world as he sees it. The red pill will show him the truth, but life will never be the same again. Everything that he had previously thought to be the case will be transformed and challenged. Neo takes the red pill. Embarking on finding another way to parent is like taking that red pill; everything will change; you will question everything. It's unnerving, but it's a great adventure.

Consent based parenting is just as exciting as Neo's choice. We can choose to live in ways that don't rely on rules on conflict between parents and children, but we need to know how to start. The place to start is in your head.

Become an Optimistic Parent

Once we think something is impossible we are generally on a hiding to nowhere. Optimism actually makes a difference and if we are genuinely going to help our children get what they want from life and enjoy life ourselves then we need to be optimistic parents who have dealt with some fears and doubts ourselves. So I want to look at some of the doubts that might already be taking shape in your thoughts and, in the process, help you to find the confidence to go on asking the questions that will help you to help your children.

To become this optimistic parent we first have to dispel a few myths that sometimes seem obvious, but actually are deeply questionable. To become an optimistic parent we have to think that compulsion isn't our friend and instead develop new ideas for optimistic parenting.

Compulsion isn't our friend

We are quite used to the idea that sometimes children have to be made to do things. It is a very rare parent who enjoys forcing a child to do anything, but by and large the view is that a bit of compulsion is harmless or sometimes just the lesser evil. Of course most people also think that certain acts of force are obviously wrong; it's not uncommon to frown on beating a child, but accepting that a tap on the hand when a toddler is about to touch a fire is justified. Most of us draw a line that we wouldn't cross; we might not agree with any kind of physical discipline, but a stiff talking to, being grounded or losing pocket money might seem like useful ways of motivating good and responsible behavior.

Most of us think that compulsion is inevitable. Such acts of force, we tell ourselves, are the normal stuff of life that all of us have to be able to accept and get over quickly. Well, they are certainly commonplace, but I want you to think again; not so that you can wallow in guilt, but simply so that you can live differently.

Meet Alex, a lively four-year-old who has been brought up in a caring, busy family. He has an older sister, Jenny, who is seven and a baby brother, Jack. His Dad works long hours, sometimes away from home overnight, and his Mum, Emma, is beginning to feel over tired. Baby Jack likes to do some of his feeding at night, but tends to have a long sleep in the evening from around eight o'clock. Jenny, tired out by school, happily settles down by eight in the evening and Emma thinks this would be an ideal time to get some extra sleep for herself, especially on those evenings when her partner, Steve, is away from home. The problem is Alex. Alex has never seemed to need a great deal of sleep. He's only recently begun to sleep through the night, but he simply won't settle down as early as eight in the evening. To make matters worse, he also wants to be up early in the morning as well. Emma is at the end of her tether, she is worn out and often feels bad tempered and resentful with Alex during the daytime.

Emma reads the books and consults her friends and is convinced that it is Alex's intransigence that is causing her all these problems. Everything would be much better for everyone, Alex included, if she could go to bed early two or three times a week. Everyone tells her that she has to get tough with Alex, for his sake and her own, and teach him that he has to go to bed at a 'reasonable' hour and stay there until a 'reasonable' hour.

We can all sympathize with Emma; being at home with young children, doing the lion's share of childcare and feeling sleep deprived into the bargain are not made any easier by being commonplace. Of course Emma needs more sleep. The mistake

that conventional parenting theories, friends and Emma are making is to decide in advance that there is one solution and that this solution is so important that it is worth compelling Alex; even believing that the compulsion is as much for Alex's benefit as anyone else's. Later on, I'll return to the subject of finding solutions in tight corners like this one, but for now I want to concentrate not on the many possible solutions to this situation, but on Alex and the damage that may be being done to him.

We have to admit that we don't actually know what the damage is. The problem with using force, whether physical or emotional, is that it affects every individual in unique ways. Some children are seemingly impervious to what might look like horrific and substantial force. Other children can be put into states of turmoil from what seem to be very minor and everyday acts of subtle manipulation. One child triumphantly proclaims 'That didn't hurt!' as she is smacked for the tenth time that day, while another whimpers at the slightest cross look from his mother. It's for this reason that we can't establish an acceptable quota of force or manipulation that can be safely used on children. It's similar to a pregnant woman drinking alcohol. In theory there is no safe amount. That doesn't mean that one glass of champagne at your best friend's wedding is definitely going to harm your baby. It is simply that we can't actually know whether some miniscule or slightly larger damage might occur for that particular fetus at that particular stage of development or whether there will be no effect at all.

The effect of compulsion is something that happens in the mind of another human being, so when we talk about damage we are not talking about something measurable. We can't predict that one smack will result in 2% thinking damage or that six months of being forced to go to bed at a particular time will result in 4% thinking damage. Humans are simply not that predictable. What we can say is that every act of compulsion risks doing some damage to how that person thinks and to the relationship that becomes based on conflict and hurt.

Life is full of things to blame: if our children behave badly or grow up as unhappy individuals we have a ready list of culprits to reach for: sugar, E numbers, food allergies, pollution, TV, computers, syndromes like ADHD or Asperger's, peer pressure, schools, the decline of the church, the breakdown of community, changing standards of discipline or a thousand and one other bogeys. Amongst so many competing pressures and when it is obvious that parents, for the most part, care passionately about their children and do everything in their power to do their best for them, it seems cruel and unhelpful to blame parents for their thirty-year-old son's sleep problems because they insisted on a

certain bedtime when he was four. This book is not a charter for blame or guilt and nor am I attempting to make parents responsible for every little action of every child aged 0-90. What I do want is to help parents to think again about how to live better in this moment. We have all made mistakes in the past and we will all make mistakes in the future, but that doesn't need to stop us doing all that we humanly can to find optimistic and creative ways to do less harm and more good. If we look at compulsion differently and see force not as an ally in child raising, but as potentially damaging then we will find other ways to live together well.

Ideas for the optimistic parent

To begin to rid ourselves of the idea that compulsion is a useful parenting tool, we need some new ideas to put in its place. When we talk about helping our children to help themselves we're talking about some new parenting ideas such as:

- swapping consent for compulsion;
- treating children as reasonable people;
- trusting our children and their built in desires
- recognizing our human limitations;
- using the resourcefulness we all have;
- changing our minds is a good thing;
- questioning the things we always assumed;
- finding solutions that everyone wants
- being confident that solutions exist

These few simple ideas are the tools with which we can revolutionize family relationships.

Swapping consent for compulsion

One of the difficulties that parents who are new to living by consent often appear to encounter is that they rush to become 'non-coercive' and run into all kinds of tight corners, quickly getting demotivated and exhausted. The constant elimination of coercion, compulsion, force and manipulation from family life is certainly necessary, but it is much more important to build systems of consent than to merely avoid force and compulsion. The key is to first stop thinking of parents as authority figures and then to stop seeing children as not quite full human beings.

If I have to find a solution with my adult friend then I have to do so without believing that I have authority over him or imagining that he is not a fully human individual. The same is true with our children. Once we begin to think like this then avoiding compulsion becomes secondary to building consent, a much

more positive way of living for everyone.

That said, we do need to have our antenna attuned for signs of compulsion. In this book I will use 'compulsion' to refer to any kind of constraint that is used to force a child to follow a course of behavior against her wishes. A child washing up whilst she really wants to climb a tree, a child who is made to put on a track suit to go shopping when he wants to go in his pajamas, or a child doing homework when she really wants to be watching her favorite TV show, would be obvious examples. Compulsion, though, is not always obvious. Perhaps the child working through a science workbook has been told by her parents to clean the rabbit hutch. The child wants to watch 'The Simpsons', but the parent is adamant that the hutch needs cleaning now, so the child responds that she was actually planning to get on with her science homework. The parent approves of this and agrees that this is a more worthwhile activity, at least for the time being. In the parent's hierarchy of activities, cleaning rabbit hutches shouldn't interrupt science homework any more than TV watching should interrupt pet care. The child is compelled against her will, even though she suggested doing the homework. How can she think clearly about these things when her mind is so full of tangled subterfuge?

Compulsion can be direct or it can be subtle and manipulative. Children want their parent's love and approval. Whenever love and approval are conditional, whether the condition is getting a high score in a spelling test, eating cabbage, or only watching parentally condoned television shows, there is compulsion. Anything that is done against the child's will, anything that causes the child to do or think x while he still wants to do or think y, is compulsion.

That's not to say that we will always succeed in avoiding compulsion, but when we stop thinking of it as a justifiable last resort, then we are much more likely to find other solutions more and more often. If we do justify compulsion then we will sabotage the whole attempt to move into consent-based living. Children cannot trust that they have moved into a consensual environment or that it is in their interests to join in with the process of finding solutions if they know that the bottom line is that the parent reserves the right to compel. In order to be willing to be open-minded and available to the possibility of change, children need to be confident that they don't have to come up with a solution that fits into the parental notion of necessary action.

So what does consent mean?

- Children not being forced to follow one course of behavior whilst they wish to be doing something else.
- Children not being forced to resort to subterfuge in order to avoid certain acts of compulsion (e.g. offering to take the dog for a walk rather than do household chores when the child really wants to be climbing a tree)
- Parents avoiding doing things that compel a child to act against his wishes. (We're not just talking about those overt things like smacking or forcibly moving a child or confining a child to a room. Many of us as parents develop a skillful repertoire of disapproving glances, sighs and postures that our children understand all too well.)
- Parents not reserving compulsion as a last line of defense.

Consent based parenting is only going to work if your children can trust that your advice is your best idea, not just a backdoor method of control. Of course you'll make mistakes, and you can apologize, but apology is very different from justifying compulsion..

Treating children as reasonable people

When we talk about thinking damage caused by compulsion, we're not talking about the bruises an abused child receives in a violent home, but about something that takes place in the mind of the child. Force has the potential to affect how we think about things. The turmoil of having to do something whilst another wish is uppermost affects how Tom thinks. Areas like eating, playing, learning etc. can all be affected. That's where reason comes in. Like adults, when children have the space to genuinely engage in a search for solutions that please everyone they learn how to remain reasonable people.

There is often a tendency to believe that reasoning is something that develops with maturity and experience, and that it is dependent on our ability to construct an articulate argument. This kind of thinking allows that we can 'reason' with older children according to their age and developing intellectual capacity, but not with babies, toddlers and young children who are pre-verbal or have more limited articulacy and logic. Being a reasonable and reasoning being is not the same as having a certain level of articulacy, intellectual development or verbal logic. A baby constantly creates new knowledge and as such is a reasonable being. We can find solutions with any reasoning being. We may not always use words. We may sometimes use very simple words with visual and practical demonstration, but we will definitely be aware of a baby or toddler's wishes. We can

also clearly see that toddlers and babies are able to move to new wishes or (in their own way) suggest new solutions to adults.

Children, like adults, are reasoning human beings. Of course that doesn't mean that a child will never act irrationally, any more than being a reasoning person means that you and I will never act irrationally. However just because a child is or appears to be unreasonable is not a justification for doing something that could only add more damage and make the child even more irrational in the longer term. This is a none-solution. Even more importantly, we always have to be cautious when we are judging someone else's rationality. It is impossible to look into another mind. Sometimes when we think that our child is being irrational it is quite possible that they actually have idea which deserves consideration but, but our own irrationality stops us from seeing it. Getting into psychological guessing games is futile. We do far better to simply meet each idea with some engagement and resourcefulness, without using dismissive labels and with optimistic open minds.

Respecting that children are at least as reasonable and capable of reason as anyone else entails:

- engaging with each individual's ideas, even when they seem challenging
- being open enough to examine our own ideas and consider our children's ideas
- being prepared to change our minds
- being determined to find solutions to problems (whether a toddler trying to undo a bottle, a teenager composing music or a parent rethinking chores.)
- avoiding making guesses about what is in the minds of others so that we stop labeling certain ideas or behavior 'irrational' (yes, we might be right, but we can't know for certain and more compulsion won't help!)

Trusting our children and their built in desires

Who owns a child? Sadly, few people think that the answer is the child himself. I will return to this subject in more depth in chapter 5, but for now I want to simply set out the position that each of us owns ourselves, even if we are only a few minutes old.

There are those who see themselves as radical and liberal thinkers who still have problems with this idea. The supposedly libertarian writer Roderick T Long, for example, has argued that the fact of coming into the world as dependent beings implies the duty of obedience in return for the parental obligation to provide care. The justification for parental

guardianship in return for the obedience of children is not only that it benefits children (parents know best) but that children, "lack the capacity to make rational decisions about their lives.... Consider the analogy of a person in a coma; we make medical decisions for such persons without their consent, because we assume they would consent if they were able to do so... I suggest that children may be considered as instances of diminished capacity; guardians act as agents for children, treating the children as they judge the children would consent to be treated if their faculties were fully developed."

I want to suggest that not having verbal articulacy is not the same as being irrational or comatose. The tiniest babies exhibit their own motives, will and ability to gain new knowledge; in short they have all that is needed to enable us to problem solve with them without having to stamp on their deepest and most basic drives and wishes. Certainly parents have a duty to help their children (as I will discuss at length in chapter 2) but there is no good reason why this help should have to come in the guise of thwarting children or treating them as no more rational than coma victims.

Parents are certainly the best people to offer information, moral advice and reasons that make sense according to the age and development of an individual child; parents should always be engaged with their children and not neglectful. Certainly there are extreme cases when we have to assume that we would have the child's consent all things being equal (some medical emergencies or a non suicidal child with no understanding of physics and no safety equipment deciding to jump from the thirteenth floor of a tower block to gain an experience of falling, for example), but these are rare occasions, not the standard interactions of parent-child relationships.

We don't gradually become human and it is a condition of being a full human being that you are a full and free self. There is no justification for spending the first years of a child's life causing distress or gradually treating the child we have harmed as incrementally less incapacitated.

If children have reason and if compulsion damages thinking then we need to be working with that reason and building an environment of consent from the moment we become aware that it is possible. This entails putting children's inner desires for their lives first. We are all unique. Each of us has ideas that we work from, genes that we have inherited, dispositions, characters, motives and wishes. These are not fixed and unchangeable and it is our ability to change these things that enables us to be resourceful, flexible, problem solving people. That said we exercise our freedom in so far as we act in accord

with our own motives. Parents have an enormous role in shaping a child's motives, but ultimately a child belongs to herself and she is free only if she is not thwarted in acting accord with her own motives. The foundation of a free life is simply what it says it is; the freedom to act as we want (and I'll explain later why that won't mean acting like immoral monsters).

Children are learning the most, growing the most and harmed the least when:

- they are treated as full, free human beings, not as property
- when they are doing the things that are in tune with their own motives
- when they are having fun and doing what they want

If the thought of all that terrifies you take a deep breath and keep reading; we are talking about reasonable, moral children and young people here, not self destructive and wantonly harmful terrors.

Recognizing our human limitations

One thing that greatly assists consensual living is for parents to recognize their own limitations. If we take seriously the possibility that we might be wrong then we are much less likely to attempt to compel our view onto another, even when we strongly believe that it is correct. This recognition is central to rational parenting with consent. Our ideas may well be right, but we can never know that as an absolute certainty. We should always be open to the possibility that the other person, even if she is a distressed two-year old, has a better idea.

No-one is infallible, no-one knows everything, no-one is without short-comings, foibles and hang-ups; remember

- You may be wrong, even when you are sure that you're right
- Being tentative keeps the search for solutions open and is much more likely to lead to an outcome everyone wants.

Using the resourcefulness we all have

Another crucial element in finding consent-based solutions is simple resourcefulness; the kind of creative and innovative ability to change our ideas in favor of something better, something that helps. Consent based parents have to be resourceful and their children's resourcefulness is also important. It's simply about:

- finding solutions
- everyone, parents and children, being open to changing their minds
- thinking of new ideas (not in the sense of advancing world shattering new hypotheses, but in the sense of discovering

new ideas which are useful and relevant to your family and build your environment of consent)

Changing our minds is a good thing

Along the way reason and resourcefulness are aided by the ability of everyone in a family to review our ideas. We might think about this as 'criticism', but criticism generally has had a bad, if undeserved press, and this is certainly not an invitation to disparage your child's arguments or to be dismissive. A feature of helping children to get what they want is to engage with their ideas, point out problems and make genuine contributions. When there is no compulsion on the child to accept your alternative ideas, then they tend to feel more relaxed about listening and giving your suggestions real consideration. We can help one another by offering ways of reviewing our ideas. Review requires that we share:

- the best ideas, opinions, morals, information and suggestions that we have available
- that we offer our ideas without compulsion
- that we remain open to the possibility that our suggestions and assumptions may be wrong
- that we don't keep repeating the same ideas ad nauseam and long after our children have asked us to desist

Questioning the things we've always assumed

We all hold deeply rooted ideas, from states of mind to genetic dispositions to articulated ideas. All of us have our own assumptions, ideas and theories, some of them consciously held, others more inarticulate, but deeply ingrained; things might refer to as intuitions or simply our particular tendencies of thought and behavior.

Let's consider Ellen. After a childhood filled with conventional compulsion, Ellen grows up and becomes a parent. She is convinced that children need to eat a very careful diet to keep them healthy. Ellen assumes that a diet that is sugar free, additive free and vegan is best. Her child has other ideas, and months, if not years, of conflict and misery follow while Ellen imposes her 'essential' food assumptions on her son. It may be that Ellen has some good and reasonable ideas about eating, but she has become incapable of thinking openly and reasonably about food. No amount of reason or counter argument is going to convince Ellen that her son's brain and health do not require this particular and strict diet. Ellen's friends offer other good ideas. Ellen can see that her friends' children do not appear to be suffering from malnutrition, lethargy or the bizarre behaviors that

she feels a wider diet would lead to, but she still can't bring herself to let go of her enormous fear that without a controlled diet her child will suffer. Ellen's ideas are entrenched. Parenting is a practical activity; it involves actions, but those actions rely on our thinking; our ideas and assumptions matter.

Ellen's practice as a parent is completely controlled by food assumptions that she can't even begin to evaluate herself. All of us have areas where our thinking is far from clear. All of us hold some ideas that are so deeply entrenched that they present obstacles in our way, often without us ever realizing that this is the case. This is a theme to which we will return in detail in chapter three, but for now we simply need to realize that our thinking matters when we are parents; assumptions count:

- assumptions are anything from morals to opinions to tendencies
- assumptions can be very deeply entrenched, sometimes so deeply that we do not even articulate them; they are unquestioned.
- assumptions can change, especially when we engage them with reason and resourcefulness whilst recognizing our limitations.

Finding solutions that everyone wants

A key feature of any family trying to live by consent is the practice of finding mutual solutions. This is simply any solution to any problem that all the participants agree to be preferable to either their original solutions or to any other solutions that have been considered. A mutual solution implies a win-win situation in which everyone is pleased with the outcome. It is not a compromise in which one person wins whilst others give way, reluctantly or sadly or with the poor option that they will get their turn to win another time. Mutual solutions rely on genuine consent. They also rely on the ability of the participants to change their original wishes during the process of problem solving. This does not mean that original wishes are never followed. Sometimes the original wish of one person may turn out to be the mutual solution of all, but unless there is a basic willingness to change and explore new ideas then no mutual solution can be reached. To find solutions we have to use reason and resourcefulness. It also requires that we have the optimism to believe that solutions to problems do exist, even if we don't always find them.

Within families, we are not used to win-win scenarios with everyone on the same side. We are used to assuming that often, if not always, someone must lose; that compromise is about as

good as it gets, and that conflict is inevitable. This is not a utopian book and I am not advocating an elite parenting theory for perfect people or for parents chronically addicted to sacrificing themselves to their monstrously demanding children, but I can tell you that mutual solutions do work. They work in large and small families, poor and rich families, families from every cultural and ethnic background, families with and without adherence to particular faiths, families with one parent or two parents or gay parents or living in communities. Mutual solutions work wherever there is a fundamental trust that children are reasonable and resourceful; wherever there is the essential realism to admit that we are all limited and therefore need to proceed on every issue with an open mind; wherever we are willing to devote our time, energy, and resources to consent, instead of to conflict and damage.

Mutual solutions also require another basic assumption. In order to enter into the process of finding mutual solutions with our children, we have to believe that a child getting 'what he wants' is not the opposite of moral living and caring about others. Children expressing their wishes are simply doing the right thing for themselves, which may very well be the thing that also has great benefits for others as well. Why should we think that, given respect and treated as full human beings, our children would choose evil? It is a fear that is false and which needs questioning at every turn (and an issue to which we will return).

Mutual solutions are the final essential ingredient of consent based parenting; parenting so that everyone wins. When we talk about mutual solutions we mean:

- solutions that everyone really desires (not compromises)
- solutions that have the consent of all parties
- solutions that are found when everyone engages their reason and resourcefulness
- solutions that are found when those involved are willing to change their minds (though that doesn't mean that first suggestions never become mutual solutions)
- solutions that take seriously that everyone getting what they want is a good thing.

Being confident that solutions exist

All of this brings me back to optimism. When we feel confident and resourceful and believe that problems can be solved, life improves.

I will return to this theme more fully in chapter ten, but we need to ask from the start whether we actually believe that the world is one in which solutions exist (at least in theory and even

when they sometimes escape us). If our view of the universe is essentially pessimistic; if we think some problems are incapable of solution (even in theory in the far off mists of time) then we are much more likely to give up seeking solutions when things become hard.

- as part of a positive approach we need to value not only the solutions we find, but also the whole process of problem solving
- solutions do exist, even if not now, even if our limitations hamper us in finding them, even if we can't always know for certain when we have reached the truth

Moving on as an Optimistic Parent

Helping our children to get what they want demands a whole new relationship between parents and children. It is a radical departure from most of what we thought we knew about being parents and it raises a lot of questions. Isn't it likely to lead to neglect? What if the child wants to engage in all sorts of dangerous or immoral behaviors? Surely parents end up as slaves to every childish whim with no time or energy to do what they want in their own lives?

Doing something new always brings fears and doubts, but all of these questions can be answered. Consent based parenting is not a recipe for neglect, immorality, social services intervention or burnt out parents; feel the fear and live well anyway. Life will never be the same again and, once you have begun to experience the pleasures of living by consent, nor would you want it to be; but you probably do want to know where you might fit in your child's life.