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Not My Kid: 21 Steps to Raising a Non-Violent Child

Mary Muscari
University of Scranton Press (February 2002)
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These are violent times. Even before the terrorists and war, some teens were so drenched in the culture of mayhem they thought it made sense to open fire on their classmates.

The author, who was a psychiatric clinical specialist at New York Medical College and is now an associate professor of nursing at the University of Scranton and a certified pediatric nurse practitioner, has written this book to help parents raise nonviolent kids in a violent world.

Even the most angelic toddler sometimes drops to the floor for an all-out tantrum and even the best-behaved teen can fall prey to peer pressure, so Muscari starts her book by outlining the difference between normal and abnormal behavior. For toddlers, for example, temper tantrums are normal, but head banging or other forms of self-injury during those tantrums is not.

Muscari insists there is no “gene for violence,” though she notes some kids are more hot-tempered than others. Factors that foster violence include poverty and exposure to violence at home and in the media. “Violence prevention, like the prevention of any other health problem, begins at home,” she says.

Her tone is cheerful and encouraging. “This won’t be easy,” she writes. “Then again, you can do it.”

The book is loaded with advice. Give children plenty of time, love, and attention. Set rules and limits, but don’t discipline by spanking. Teach responsibility by assigning chores. Teach money management by giving an allowance. Limit exposure to media violence by removing the television from your child’s room and monitoring what your child watches. Keep guns away from children. Help your child find nonviolent outlets for frustration. Watch for warning signs and get professional help if necessary.

None of this is earth-shatteringly original, and some of it is much easier to say than do, like “don’t measure your child against other children,” or, to help keep your child from joining a gang, “supervise her activities and know her whereabouts at all times.” However, Muscari’s commonsensical, take-action approach may be just the ticket for parents who feel their family situation is spiraling out of control.

KAREN NITKIN (December 16, 2001)

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