



*Positive Family Changes  
Through the PCI Coaching Model*

# PARENT SUCCESS STORIES



Edited by

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Founder, Parent Coaching Institute

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Names of the parents involved in the stories have been changed in order to protect their privacy. Any resulting resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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*With gratitude,*

*to mothers and fathers everywhere  
who work hard to parent well.*

*Truly, that is how the world transforms.*



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# ***Introduction***

*Welcome to PCI Parent Coaching...  
A New Paradigm for Family Transformation*

In 1999 I typed in “parent coaching” on Internet search engines to see what was out there. To my mild surprise—nothing came up. Same for “parenting coach.” And so began my journey to a successful way to effect positive change in families—parent coaching.

What I love about parent coaching is that it allows moms and dads the opportunity of a relationship with a professional who walks “shoulder-to-shoulder” with them. Compassionate understanding, non-judgmental listening, and open curiosity are part of an inquiry process that over time has profound outcomes, as you will see from these inspiring stories. Coaching not only provides context-specific practical strategies in a timely way, but also an opportunity for parents to reflect upon what is important, choose ideas and applications to try out, and explore what works best in his or her unique situation.

The PCI Parent Coaching Model consists of an identifiable theoretical basis that forms the foundation for the one-year, graduate-level training program and the foundation for our focus when we coach parents. We call the theoretical basis our “*four pillars.*” Just like the

elements of H<sub>2</sub>O need to be all there to make water, so too, all four pillars need to be present to provide successful parent coaching. These four pillars, drawn from diverse disciplines, have been researched to be the most effective way to catalyze positive, long-lasting, transformative change for families.

The true stories in this book are told by the PCI Certified Parent Coaches® from their first-hand experience. All the names of the parents have been changed to protect their privacy. Each of the four sections focuses on one specific “pillar” of the coaching model.

*Section One* contains stories that show the application of one or more of the Living System principles we use in our coaching. What does it mean to approach parenting as “a living system?” Aren’t all moms and dads alive? Yes, of course. Utilizing a Living System approach isn’t a description of the obvious; rather it’s a new understanding of parenting from a natural dynamic, altering our conception and implementation of family support methodologies. A Living System approach enables professionals to skillfully and more realistically meet the needs of parents, since its underlying principles nurture and expand life fulfillment.

Parents coached and supported from a Living System perspective find solace, relief, and inspiration. Instead of treating themselves like robots with unrealistic expectations, parents come to appreciate their humanness in profound ways, treating themselves and their children with greater compassion and respect. Embracing their human limitations paradoxically inspires moms and dads to pursue possibilities, enhancing the quality of their daily living, long after the coaching has ended.



Life with children becomes more adventurous than arduous as parents redirect their energies to orchestrate growth rather than impose it.

*Section Two* highlights how parenting, with the child's brain in mind, helps moms and dads effectively meet cognitive, emotional, and social needs at each crucial stage of development. Even though the 1990s has been heralded as “the decade of the brain”, many parents still do not have enough understanding of the recent brain research and how to apply it to parenting challenges. The PCI Coaching Model helps parents translate this important research into practical actions in two major ways.

First, the coach is trained to observe parenting practices and gently call parents' attention to the brain research implications as appropriate. For instance, we know there is a major spurt of language receptivity between ages two and four. If parents have not yet started reading aloud to their children at those ages, the research would be shared with them in concepts that they can understand, so that they can be encouraged to begin this practice. For parents already doing this activity, the coach would affirm their efforts, spurring them on by explaining that the research supports this excellent parenting practice.

Another way PCI-trained parent coaches help parents align their daily decisions and parenting priorities with brain-compatible techniques is by focusing on “The Vital Five™”. These are five critical developmental needs that often are shortchanged in the midst of modern-day stresses and overwhelming burdens placed on parents today. (For more information, please see my book, *Parenting Well in a Media Age*, which discusses The Vital Five™ in detail, devoting a chapter to each.)

**The Vital Five™ are:**

- Bonding in infancy and an on-going loving relationship with parents and caring adults during childhood and through adolescence
- Bonding to self and developing an interior life, i.e., a solid self-identity
- Developing the capacity for an imagination
- Participating often in creative expression, enhancing both mental skills and intrinsic motivation in the process
- Contributing to others: to feel belonging by authentically contributing to that which is meaningful

These five needs of both children and adults get shortchanged in our mass media, commercialized culture. Sadly, too many children grow up with none of these needs fully attended to. During coaching sessions, however, parents are shown how different activities they do throughout the day can support one or more of The Vital Five™.

Parents usually get very excited to see all the positive changes in their children when they intentionally focus on their children's brain growth. They often experience more ease in their parenting because when children's developmental needs are met, many struggles disappear, along with parents' worries and anxieties. The entire family relaxes, enjoying the child's growth in competence and creative capacity.

*Section Three* describes stories about the impact of the environment on child development. What surrounds the child, whether it is the family home, the classroom setting,

the neighborhood, or the commercialized culture, profoundly impacts children's attitudes, behaviors, and values.

PCI Certified Parent Coaches® often refer to the “growth sphere” to help parents understand that all that is “out there” enters the child's personal zone and impacts his/her growth in either positive or negative ways. What enters the child's and teen's growth sphere is managed by parents for eighteen years. In a very real sense, the parenting journey is about teaching our children how to manage their own growth spheres so that their strong self-identity stays intact and self-actualization does occur, despite any negative influences from the outside world.

There is so much parents can do in their home environment to set a loving tone, ignite curiosity, and support children's optimal creative expression. The stories in this section give potent examples of John Dewey's thoughtful remark, “The environment teaches.”

*Section Four* demonstrates how Appreciative Inquiry as the coaching core process methodology powerfully helps parents attain their dreams. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed in the mid-80's, by business consultant and professor at Case Western University, Dr. David Cooperrider. He and his colleagues define AI in this way:

“Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives ‘life’ to a living system, when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms... In AI, the

arduous task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, and design.” (*Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change*, Stipes Publishing, 2000, p. 5.)

AI has been researched in corporations, community organizations, and schools. It has a wonderful track record for supporting positive, long-term changes. The PCI Coaching Model uses the AI process in parent coaching conversations, along with its principles which are in alignment with Living System principles. Instead of jumping in to solve the problem directly, AI employs a four-stage process:

- Discovery:** finding out through well-crafted and careful questions what is presently working in the situation. What is currently giving life to the parents? The children? The family?
- Dream:** helping parents articulate a clear vision of what it is they want and then to feel the positive emotions and qualities that living in their preferred future with their child would evoke.
- Design:** encouraging strategies, ideas, behaviors, parenting practices, reflective exercises, and other applications to help parents design both external activities and internal attitudes that would best support fulfillment of their dream.

**Destiny:** as the parents' dream emerges, the role of the coach is to point out the "evidence indicators" that this is happening and also to help the parent gather the qualities and resources to make sure the ideal is sustainable and that acknowledgement of deep, positive change has occurred.

You will see AI imbedded in all the stories. In fact, you will see threads of each of the four "pillars" in all of the stories as they weave together a rich tapestry of positive changes in the lives of families. Enjoy the hope and inspiration!

Gloria DeGaetano  
Founder, Parent Coaching Institute  
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# **Section One**

## ***Sustainable Change Through Living System Principles***

*Parents coached and supported from a Living System perspective find solace, relief, and inspiration in this new awareness of self as a living dynamic being.*

*Instead of treating themselves like robots with unrealistic expectations, they come to appreciate their humanness in profound ways, treating themselves and their children with greater compassion and respect. Embracing their human limitations paradoxically inspires moms and dads to pursue possibilities, enhancing the quality of their daily living, long after the coaching has ended.*

*Life with children becomes more adventurous than arduous, as parents redirect their energies to orchestrate growth rather than impose it.*





## ***Order Out of Chaos... One Step at a Time***

*Chaos in a living system is to be expected as part of the normal course—families included. But too much chaos over time can be debilitating, draining precious energy and creative potential. Parent coaching, as Jeanne's story shows, can begin the step-by-step process of organizing for more order, and with it, re-awakened parental satisfaction and family happiness.*

I remember with a smile the first time I talked to Ericka. She had mentioned to me once that she might want to try parent coaching but just never seemed to find the time. This day she realized she needed a coach immediately. With four children under the age of seven, every day was an adventure. But the day she called was the worst. It began by getting her seven-year-old, Joe, and four-year-old, Emily, up and ready for school. She couldn't even walk through Joe's room because of the clutter. She tripped over a mystery object, cracking her head on his dresser. When she went to Emily's room she found a melted ice cream pail under her covers that she had obviously gotten from the freezer during the night. Emily had also finger painted

with the ice cream all over her wall. Two-year-old Nate took his diaper off during the night as he usually does and well, you can imagine that disaster. The five-month-old baby, Seth, was screaming to be fed.

After dropping Joe and Emily at school and preschool, Ericka had two hours to herself. Well, it seemed like to herself with only the two youngest children to care for. It was 8 o'clock in the morning and she was exhausted already! She decided to stop at McDonald's and let Nate wander in the Playland area for awhile (secretly hoping he would be tired and take a good nap later). Knowing that Nate is a "runner", she tried to watch him closely. As she was calmly nursing the baby someone yelled that there was a young child standing in the middle of the busy street...and sure enough it was Nate! She handed the baby to the closest stranger and ran to retrieve him with nursing apparatus hanging out. As Ericka packed the two children in the car, she just breathed an exhausted, frustrated breath. For just this moment they were both strapped in and safe. Where would she get the energy to get through the day?

When she returned home and the three younger children were all in beds for naps, she decided she needed a parent coach. She walked through the living room, past the six baskets of laundry to be folded and put away. She ignored them and called me. What a glorious journey we were about to take. As always with a new client, I wondered where to start. Ericka had four challenging children, an exhausting schedule, housework well behind and problems mounting day by day. She never had time to enjoy her family. Coaching would change that. I knew I could help her find that joy again.

Our first obstacle was finding time for coaching—with only 24 hours in a day, it seemed daunting to find a quiet time for our phone coaching conversations. We tried one week to talk during the proposed naptime but found that all three children never napped at the same time. We needed to find an uninterrupted time. At first we arranged to speak early in the morning before the children were up. It worked but I knew we'd find a better way!

As with all coaching journeys, Ericka and I stood shoulder to shoulder examining the situation together, seeing the situation through different eyes. Looking at it from Ericka's perspective it appeared her children, her life, her home were all in chaos, and it looked like an overwhelming intertwining of problems with nowhere to start. As her coach I saw the potential. I asked her to step out of the situation for just a moment and look non-emotionally at the stress and chaos of her family.

Together we looked at her situation from a different angle. We talked about all the things that in fact were working. At first Ericka had a very difficult time seeing even one thing that worked well in her family, but once we opened that dialogue, the positives flew. Positive thinking fueled her creativity. She noticed that the core of her family was solid, but there were many loose strings floating about. If we could catch those loose ends and weave them back into the fabric of the family, things would work better. After several conversations listing all the things about her family that brought her joy, Ericka was ready to take an action step.

Focusing on the first loose end she could wrap her mind around, Ericka took a first step to ask for help, though she didn't have the foggiest clue where she would

find someone. In one session we brainstormed all of the possibilities she could think of. Far down her list was her church community. This was an exciting ah-ha discovery for Ericka! She put her need out into the church family and was excited that a few retired ladies offered to help her.

With a retired grandma coming over one morning a week, we finally had a set time for coaching. The woman was warm and caring to both Ericka and her children; her nurturing support was a welcome relief. We did our coaching that morning, leaving a snippet of time for Erika to tackle some chores that needed to be taken care of. It was amazing what one hour of uninterrupted time gave her! Her energy and zeal for life was returning. She felt as if she was accomplishing things—being proactive instead of reactive.

Ericka had all the answers on her own. As a coach, I helped her identify where she wanted her energy to be spent. She realized that the constant distractions and crises were using all the energy she wanted to use appreciating her active children.

We talked about what she most appreciated about her family and then how to get there. The coaching process offered her an opportunity to slow down and concentrate on deliberately parenting. Her reasons for choosing to be a mother came back into focus. Ericka found satisfaction in being a mom and found joy in everyday things her children did. As she began smiling at them more, they relaxed and were more compliant. As a coach, catalyzing such a change of heart is overwhelming. Just to hear the energy in her voice building each week makes me proud of what I can offer families.

Sitting quietly and just taking care of herself for an hour once a week helped Ericka focus attention on really enjoying her children. So much of her time was spent cleaning up or reacting to what was happening while exhausted. Little time was left to create memories with her children. When I asked her what she wanted her children to remember about being her children, she realized that the constant chaos robbed her of time for hugs and play! She wanted them to remember fun times, laughing, playing games, doing crafts, reading stories, and eating together.

One of the activities that Ericka and her children loved was drama. The children enjoyed putting on “shows” or acting out favorite stories. Ericka had ideas for beautiful costumes she wanted to create for those times. There just was never a good time to take on those projects. “Why not provide some fabric pieces or large scarves and let the children’s imaginations create the costumes?” I suggested. It turned out wonderfully. She created a dress-up box with large pieces of different colored fabrics and recycled accessories that soon became many different characters! By keeping play simple and imaginative, it took one more “should do” from her list of responsibilities. Ericka now had more time to laugh with her children. This soon became their favorite afternoon activity! Even Nate joins in, finding his niche in each vignette instead of running away.

The momentum Ericka gained from experiencing these grounding activities with her children pushed her to make a plan for what it would take to get that hour or two a day just for the family. It was clear that she needed some household help on a regular basis. Through our coaching she realized she had many support systems available that hadn’t been tapped. The one morning per week help soon turned into

two mornings. Ericka cleared those two days a week of driving her two kids ten miles back and forth to school by carpooling. She used those two days to get her house organized that cleared room for play so she wasn't tripping over things, losing things and just plain being overwhelmed at the mound of chores waiting for her attention. It took her three weeks to organize the playroom so it really was a playroom. Now there was at least a place to play and relax with her family. At this point she decided to hire a cleaning crew to tackle the remainder of her house. The chaos was quickly becoming manageable, as more order was created one step at a time.

It was truly amazing to see the transformation in this mom. Being more organized gave her more time and energy for positive things. The "coming-home-from-school" ritual now included sitting at the (cleared) table for a snack and chat with the kids. They choose activities together and everyone helped keep track of Nate. As the days became calmer, Dad started coming home from work earlier and earlier.

Every week I talked with Ericka, she marveled at how those same challenges presented themselves to her as before the coaching started, but now but she looked at things so differently. For example, Nate is still a runner, making it difficult for Ericka to interact with her friends at public places. But instead of feeling helpless about the situation, Ericka proactively searched out a park that is completely fenced in. Now she and her friends meet there frequently so she can get some social interaction with adults and know Nate is safe. Three months ago she would have given up taking him anywhere, keeping herself confined because she couldn't see a way out. But, with all the work she did

organizing her life with children, step by step she had the time to think the situation through and find a creative solution—meeting both her needs to keep her child safe and to have peaceful time with friends.

Erica's days are happier and she is a more nurturing mother. She tells me that coaching gave her the perspective to see her children through appreciative eyes. I believe coaching gave her another set of shoulders to hold her vast responsibilities while she sorted through them, choosing the ones she believed were valuable to her and delegating the rest. Coaching helped her love being a mom again!

Jeanne Koehler  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Milwaukee, WI



## ***Active Participation in the Change Process***

*Being a stay-at-home parent is an intense activity, a three-shifts job, a never-ending relationship. Mothers and fathers who take on this responsibility often don't fully appreciate who they are—neglecting themselves in the process. PCI Certified Parent Coaches® are trained to assist parents in giving themselves permission to dream out loud, to plan, design, and live the life of their choice: to participate in their own growth.*

Theda immigrated about eight years ago into the United States, without any knowledge of English. Life is not easy for this immigrant woman, despite her great intelligence, commitment to grow, and her remarkable capacity to adapt during adverse times. Theda is the mother of two children and lives with her husband, the children, a young adult sister who just arrived in the country and a young adult nephew from her hometown, too.

I coached Theda for fifteen sessions. Then I proposed/requested two more sessions: one after a month and then another last session after three months. The fruits of our work together not only remained stable, but also got



stronger. I am definitely also a stronger mom because of my work with her. Theda was always punctual in her calls, as well as present, formal, committed and grateful for every single coaching session.

Her initial parenting concerns were about daughter regressing in potty training and her little boy not progressing at school. Moreover, TV was taking over their daily activities. These seemed apparently simple, straightforward issues that could be dealt with by a problem-solving approach, were I to support such a notion. Taking the approach of the PCI Coaching Model and using principles from Appreciative Inquiry and Living System Theory, however, showed us that the time was ripe to learn much more. Theda and I were in for the ride.

Our initial coaching sessions were very rich because Theda was open and honest. She responded well to my positive, affirming approach. The more I inquired about what she admired most in herself as a mom and in each one of her kids, the more I could hear joy in the commitment she had to her children, their welfare, and their happiness. It only took a few exchanges for her to see her children in their own developmental stage, with their unique temperaments and speeds of learning. Moreover, the “frustrating problems” became normal issues for each age as well as part of a larger set of family dynamics. We explored how “regressing” and “lack of progress” could be in the eye of the beholder when normal cognitive, social, and motor development milestones were understood.

Slowly, during our coaching sessions, I discovered a very important issue—the relationship with Theda’s newly arrived sister, Myla, whom Theda nurtured like a mother. All of a sudden, I was coaching a mom of two young children

as well as a self-perceived mother of a young adult. Theda initially deeply believed she needed to act as a mother to her sister. This happens often in coaching. A parent comes with one set of issues and during the coaching, another set of concerns emerge.

It turned out that our work together revolved around this unexpected interaction, more than anything else. Through gentle, but constant inquiry, emphasizing the positive aspects of the relationship, Theda came to understand that Myla was busy becoming her own young adult persona. She was discovering herself in a new country. Unplugging power battles with Myla turned out to be a challenging task for Theda. Once she was clear on what was negotiable and what not, based on mutual respect, her family values and what had worked for her in her life in the U.S., she could communicate effectively with Myla. Mutual respect was regained by understanding that both women were part of a living system—both capable of promoting change where change was needed in order to take the entire system to a desired level of optimal functioning.

In Theda's particular case, she understood how her own change promotes change in the people who surround her. Theda experimented for a week with a change in attitude and a change in her behavior towards her sister. To her surprise, Myla dropped her negative attitude and started helping more at home. Role modeling, story telling, and remembering how intense it is to become a responsible, independent adult helped Theda strengthen herself and allow more space for her sister. Theda's change in attitude and mind-set spilled over into much more pleasurable interactions within members of the whole family. Her participation in her own growth process impacted the children in particular.

The last time we spoke Theda's daughter was potty trained. Her son was still watching TV but not in his room. Money and physical space continued to be tight. Life was still challenging, but she sounded strong and clear-minded. She is in the third level of her English course and has lost some of the weight she had been complaining about for years. She thoroughly enjoys her children, her sister and nephew, and her marriage. Her parental autonomy was solidified, her interdependence with her family environment, clearly established.

Thank you, Theda. We, as coaches, are forever more transformed by each one of our interactions because another mother has allowed us into her innermost space. A mother should never be left to feel isolated and should always be reminded of the most important job for humanity: hers.

Namaste to all mothers of all times.

Maritza Rivera-Gaxiola  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Seattle, WA



## ***Parenting a Teen May Mean New Parental Roles***

*A clear self-identity paradoxically enables us to shift in and out of different roles as our children mature. For supporting adolescent boys' optimal development, often it is the father who steps up parental involvement as is the case in this story. Being able to adapt to our child's needs is hallmark of a Living System approach which values change as an opportunity for growth.*

The scenario usually goes like this: I get a phone call or email from a parent who is distressed and panicked and needs help immediately. Why is it that we usually do nothing until our backs are against the wall?

“My husband and I can’t handle our teenager anymore,” says the parent. “He won’t listen and seems angry all the time. He talks back and we are at our wits’ end. We need you to help us change the way he acts.”

I smile. Been there. Done that. Just the kinds of parents I love to work with.

They are my favorite because I have walked in their shoes and felt the same feelings. When our son was 15-years-old, he was constantly angry, wouldn’t participate with the family and fought with his three sisters. His

grades were plummeting and our house was in chaos. My marriage was suffering and things needed to change—our backs were against the wall.

In the midst of our chaos, I had begun my graduate-level training with the Parent Coaching Institute and one of the first courses was “Parenting as a Living System™” which, according to the Parent Coach Certification® Training Curriculum “forms the basis for seeing parents and children as living, dynamic beings with individual strengths, talents, and creative capabilities, which are shaped and developed by the relationships within the system.” This new insight was revealed to me as I studied page after page. My husband, children, and myself became a living testimony as to how to nurture growth and love within our family system. Our personal experience prepared me for the many parents I would work with in the years to follow.

The bulk of my clients are parents who are hopeless, burned-out, and stressed; they feel guilty over their own anger and have caved in to the teen’s pressure and negative behavior. Mom gets no respect and Dad has emotionally checked-out. Consequently, the house is up for grabs and the marriage is severely tested.

When I first meet with parents, I ask them to list three words that best describe their child. It gives me an indication of the family system I am working with. Most words are critical such as stubborn, angry, lazy, self-absorbed and irresponsible. Only a handful of parents use adjectives such as intelligent, motivated, responsible or kind. The point is, as parents we tend to focus on what needs to be fixed or changed about our kids and consequently it’s easy to focus on what is wrong rather than what is right.

Kate and Steve first described their 15-year-old son, Mark, as lazy with no motivation. “He won’t talk and he’s mad all the time,” they lament. “He isn’t anything like his sister. She is kind-hearted and has a great sense of humor. We don’t like Mark’s friends. We know he isn’t getting the grades he is capable of and he isn’t trying hard enough in baseball. If he practiced more, he would be starting.”

This parental analysis views Mark as a defective “product” and problem (especially compared to his sister) and his behavior and lack of performance is the focus. The parents were looking for fast answers and a quick fix. What they needed was to engage in the “process” of parenting.

When I asked where they wanted their relationship with their son and their marriage relationship to be in three months, they used the words peaceful, humorous, trusting, warm and interactive. Fortunately, I was able to determine that Kate and Steve were willing and open to change. We agreed that their vision was to develop a positive connection and cooperation within their family system. I felt for Kate and Steve. I knew I could bring compassion and a non-judgmental attitude to our coaching relationship. Our family had made a transformation, and I was excited to share the journey.

As the weeks progressed we emphasized the concept, “what you focus on grows.” It became their mantra. We uncovered that Kate and Steve were negative the majority of the time: correcting, criticizing and managing Mark. We talked about the book, *Appreciative Living* by Jacqueline Kelm, and its concept toward daily life. Kelm says, “we tend to notice the same things over and over in given situations.” She calls this “habits of seeing.”

We construct our experiences with our children according to our “habits of seeing.” It’s like a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you are in the habit of seeing problems and negative behavior, you find more problems. If you are in the habit of seeing successes and positive behavior, you get more of what you are looking for.

Kate was aware of her “habits of seeing,” and we began with Mark’s after school routine. “He walks in the house, doesn’t say hello and goes straight to Facebook and then turns on the TV,” says Kate. We talked about creating a more positive, engaging atmosphere when Mark came home, which would shake up the routine, decrease screen time and motivate conversation.

I asked Kate some question that would require her to think deeply about Mark.

- What are some things Mark loves and is passionate about?
- When is he the happiest?
- What is his favorite snack food?
- Does he like physical touch like his back scratched?
- What is his favorite meal for dinner?
- Is there a TV program you could watch together? (and it’s not necessarily one that you love – the point is to be together!)
- Is there an activity that he enjoys that you could do together?
- Who are his role models and why?

If you want to watch your child come alive, be intentional about learning something he/she is passionate about. This was a good exercise for Kate—she had to “get to know” her son and it gave her tangible activities to do while showing him love and affection.

After a week of creative effort, Mark had a spring in his step when he walked through the door anticipating what Kate had prepared. He felt loved and cared for rather than feeling criticized and he started talking to her. Kate’s “habits of seeing” changed and she affirmed Mark in the good things she saw. She remembered the mantra: “what you focus on grows.”

As Kate made incremental changes and saw evidence of success, we started talking about Steve’s relationship with his son. When working with parents of teenagers who are acting out, I find through a discovery process that the father is either physically or emotionally absent, working incessantly or isolated while at home. Outside of divorce, it’s usually because the mother has “trained” the father to be uninvolved in parenting. For most of the child’s young life, Mom is caregiver, nurturer, and disciplinarian. Her role is so habitual that when it’s time for adolescents to cut the apron strings, it’s almost impossible. It’s difficult and unfamiliar for mom to step back and let dad take the lead.

Developmentally, it’s appropriate for adolescent sons and daughters to turn to their fathers for a new level of maturation. Mom’s role, while still vital to the family system, is more peaceful: one of nurturer and caregiver. Dad’s role as leader in the home is active and unwavering. Mom refers all decisions that have potential for arguments to Dad and he is the mouthpiece and deliverer of discipline. Most adolescents and teens will disrespect and rebel if mom is



the disciplinarian. If dad steps up and leads in a respectful manner, you will find less anger, frustration and arguments and more peace and unity. Usually mom is less stressed when relieved of her disciplinary duties, only it's a difficult habit to break and parents have to be highly intentional of their new roles in the home. Both parents model the behavior they desire in their child.

Kate confessed that she micro-managed Mark's life and did not allow Steve to assume a more connected role with Mark. Steve was immensely willing to take on the responsibility, but they both admitted it was strange at first. Kate found it difficult to let Steve handle "situations", but through our coaching we co-created a system where Kate still felt involved but Steve was the mouthpiece.

In our sessions, we reviewed how Kate's relationship with Mark had changed over the weeks, which was the evidence she needed to trust the next process. We developed new communication commitments between Steve and Kate that encouraged mutual decision-making. Prior to any major decisions regarding Mark, Steve and Kate discussed and agreed on their strategy and discipline. Depending on the situation, they would agree whether Steve would meet with Mark alone or they would meet with him together. Either way, Mark experienced a united front thereby thwarting any attempted manipulation on his part. Kate remained vital to the parenting process, but was no longer the sole recipient of Mark's anger. Steve was now a primary part of the parenting process.

Within a month, both Kate and Steve saw an improvement in Mark. Steve held firm boundaries and followed through with consequences when appropriate. Mark developed a respectful attitude toward his dad and they started spending

one-on-one time together. Steve described the new family system as fruitful and satisfying. Mark felt self-confident and consequently more responsible. Kate and Steve started affirming the good and developing an appreciative eye.

What also occurred was a shift in their marriage relationship. They were communicating more effectively which developed a form of intimacy they hadn't experienced before.

Three years later, Mark is a freshman in college and thriving. He's getting good grades and he calls his parents just to talk! Kate and Steve are empty nesters and their marriage is back on track.

The hallmark of my coaching practice is "what you focus on grows." Focusing on the positive is not a new concept, but it is profoundly effective in the practice of parenting. If you shift your focus and change your "habits of seeing" your child will respond. In time, like Kate and Steve, your relationship with your child will have new energy and life.

Jennifer Mangan  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Chicago, IL



## ***Little Things Mean More Than We Will Ever Know***

*Since all living things are interconnected in vast networks, one seemingly “little thing” can profoundly impact the entire system. You’ve heard about the “butterfly effect?” A butterfly flapping its wings to touch a wind current in Africa could influence a hurricane in Florida. Amazing. And no less amazing are the profound outcomes when parents notice and apply those “small things” that do make all the difference.*

It was the second coaching conversation for this single (newly divorced) mom who had been married for sixteen years and is the mother of two children. What a very energizing call it was for me. It is amazing how much fun it can be to talk to a client who is so motivated to move forward with their parenting. Clare had done a lot of processing over the week since our first call and her voice sounded full of life and energy...even though her divorce became final over the weekend, and her ex-husband had just left her place of business right before our coaching call. That in itself said so much about this woman’s inner strength. I affirmed that strength in her. I

told her that she is a courageous woman. I commended her for moving forward and for being so committed to doing what is best for herself and for her children.

One of the concerns was that Clare feels that as a single mom she is always second-guessing her decisions. I asked her to tell me about her thoughts concerning times that she made decisions without second guessing herself, and she said that she couldn't think of anything. After I allowed her time to think a bit, she told me about a little decision she made. Boy, oh boy, did that little decision make a huge difference for her!

She decided to go shopping over the weekend, and she bought a new bedspread for her bedroom. I then said something like, "You know, the little things you do, the little decisions you make, can sometimes mean more than you will ever know." (I really think that this is my favorite Living System principle. It is so powerful!) Clare told me that buying that bedspread really made her feel like her "old self" again. She said it even made her feel "new."

Clare shared a story with me about her old self. She said she always used to love simple things like gardening, hiking in nature, healthy eating, and watching the sunsets. She started telling me about the little changes she had made since her decision to end her marriage. After her husband left, she bought some chickens and loved watching them from her deck every morning as she sipped her morning coffee. She enjoyed watching their simple antics and seeing their personalities emerge. She told me how she had also started taking her kids on hikes and appreciating nature with them. She used to work out regularly and loved to do Yoga. She told me that she recently started doing Yoga again and she loved all of the

energy that she was gaining through that. Clare seemed to realize that those little parts of her that she had restored to her life were all adding up to make her feel like her “old self” again. Our conversation about buying the bedspread seemed to bring all of her little changes to a huge realization. It was a tangible symbol that made her feel “new.”

About three-fourths of the way through this coaching session, Clare’s pain and loss from losing the family structure of her dreams was on her heart. After sixteen years of marriage, she really thought that she would always have her partner by her side as they parented their two children together. She was very ready to move on, but she was still grieving with the loss of her marriage. I asked her to tell me some of the positive things that she was grateful for since her husband left the house. She started listing lots of little things, and as she did this, the energy filled her voice again. All I did was tell her, “When you focus on the good, you find more good, and believe it or not, more unexpected good comes to you.” I asked her if she would be interested in trying to keep a gratitude journal. She said that she once did that before she was married, and she felt like now would be a good time to start it again.

Gratitude journals are such an excellent source of parental strength and affirmation.

Clare kept a journal over the length of our coaching relationship, and it has been one of the key elements that helped her the most.

Through the parent coaching process, Clare became confident and self-assured. She felt whole and restored in her unique self. She now trusts her decisions and looks

deep within at her inner soul when making her choices. Clare has learned to trust the little changes as she lives from her heart, allowing her true spirit to shine.

Dede Barnes  
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## ***Balance Through Self-Renewal***

*Self-renewal is a distinction of living systems. From tiny cells to mighty oak trees, the natural world discharges what isn't serving healthy growth while constantly taking in nourishment to ensure healthy growth. It's the same for us humans! Roni's story reminds us that with a little support, self-renewal time can be found and from there—well, lots of good things start happening—like work and family balance.*

Sara was in her early thirties and a new mom when our parent coaching sessions began. She had had a successful career prior to parenthood. Planning to stay home for an extended period of time after the arrival of her first child, Sara was thrilled to be a mom yet, at the same time, startled to discover that being a stay-at-home parent was proving to be more challenging than going to work!

When Sara called for our first phone coaching session she sounded tired and yet eager to begin. She still was somewhat physically uncomfortable from a difficult first birth and yet emotionally peaceful—her healthy two-month old baby was asleep in his crib. She knew that events were basically unfolding well, but still she and her husband were

exhausted. Her goal for coaching was to learn more about how to live with a baby. As I listened, it brought back my own memories of those first intense months of motherhood, and I decided to share some with her.

When my husband and I decided we were ready to have a child, I thought I was ready to be a mom. I thought I knew a lot about being with children since I had been a teacher. Little did I know what I didn't know! At times, I found that quite humbling. All these decades later I still remember how often during those early years of parenthood, even though I didn't work outside the home, somehow things didn't get pulled together the way I thought they should. Dishes, laundry, and food preparation seemed to take forever. I had clear ideas about what I thought was good parenting; I was nursing rather than the common bottle feeding, and I didn't believe in the "let the baby cry to sleep" approach many parents followed. However, I was exhausted, lonely and felt incompetent. I perceived other moms managing just fine.

Fortunately my husband was supportive and very willing to be involved although that too, at the time, was unusual. Gradually we found our stride and created a world that worked well enough. Part of my joy in parent coaching is being able to support parents to discover what works well for them so a sense of ease can emerge much sooner than it did for me.

Sara and her husband had planned carefully for the arrival of their first child. They felt ready. And yet, as her husband went off to work after the baby's birth, like me, she found the days long and at times lonely. When her husband came home, the fun of cooking dinner together was not the highlight of the day as it had been prior to the



baby's arrival. Even for these healthy, well-situated young parents, reserves were on low.

As the coaching unfolded, we discovered and amplified the positives and discussed possibilities. Early on we explored the concept of holistic self-care—a new concept for Sara. Since she understood physical self-care as getting to a gym once a week where childcare was provided, we were able to consider a more comprehensive form of self-care that also included caring for one's emotional, social and intellectual wellbeing.

This struck a chord with Sara. Right from the start of our coaching relationship, she began looking for ways to rearrange things. Her husband adjusted his schedule so he could work at home one morning a week while she went off to do things on her own, even just sit in a café and read for an hour or so. It helped.

Because Sara saw benefits from these changes, our coaching shifted to explore a new form of self-care: the possibility of finding part-time work. Sara missed having the opportunity to be engaged in the kind of intellectual endeavors she loved and knew she could do well. She enjoyed being a mom and very much wanted to be the primary caregiver of her baby. But she thought having some work outside the home could refuel her in its own unique way. A part-time job would be important for her holistic self-care.

As she pondered this move, she tapped into her ambivalent feelings. Who would care for the baby? Might she get so lost in work that it would constantly be on her mind? When she was at work would she constantly be worried about the baby? By considering these questions Sara figured out that she wanted her mind on home when

at home with baby and a type of work situation that allowed her to focus on work when there.

Gradually our coaching uncovered that Sara wanted a work situation that would not take her away from home more than two or three half days a week. She wanted in-home childcare. And she wanted the childcare provider to be interested in nurturing the baby in developmentally appropriate ways (no use of media to keep her baby occupied). And of course, she also wanted the person to be attentive to maintaining a safe environment. With her dream in mind she started searching.

Clear as her ideal job was, it wasn't a smooth road to it. When she was offered a position that would have meant she needed to stop nursing, she discovered how important the experience was to her. Sara loved nursing. Exploring the pros and cons of this job offer, Sara became more aware of her basic parenting values. She came to appreciate that she and her baby weren't ready to let go of this special time for both of them and that fortunately there wasn't an economic pressure to do so. She turned down the offer and continued her search. Now her heart and mind were even more clearly established on what her dream would look like.

The first position she accepted and the childcare arrangements she found worked for a short while. Eventually she saw the need for a different childcare set up outside the home. This required discovering what she wanted in that kind of care. Sara used what she had learned from earlier sessions to gauge which situation worked the best. With tremendous tenacity she tried out different options, firmly retreating when evidence demonstrated that the childcare or the work situation didn't provide her with that sense of

peace when she was at work or at home. Slowly a good mix emerged.

Our sessions came to an end when her child was nearly a year old. During those months both the childcare and the work situation had needed to be changed. But Sara was able to relax most of the time and be mom at home and a professional member of a team at work.

Finding the balance between home and work was definitely an ongoing process for Sara. She was able to keep at it, despite setbacks, because she had learned the art of self-renewal. Taking good care of herself, she was able to continue to clarify what she wanted, spot what didn't feel right, and focus on what worked.

Sara began our coaching with wanting to know how to live with a baby. She ended our coaching with important knowledge and skills to enjoy more fully living with herself, as well.

Roni Stein, Ed. D.  
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## ***Parents Grow, Too!***

*Dulcie's story portrays the fact that growth in all its forms is core in the parenting process. We help our children grow. Yes. And they in turn, help us to grow—often in surprising ways.*

When it comes to parenting who among us is ever really ready? Most of our preparations for receiving a child into our lives revolve around the external details of gathering the accoutrements that make life with an infant possible, perhaps even easier! The nursery is ready, we have done our very best to ready ourselves and still, after our child's arrival, we hear ourselves asking "Why didn't anyone tell me about...?"! The element of surprise coupled with an incredibly steep learning curve astounds us! For nine months (or more for some of us) we were having a baby. At some point further into our new reality, it dawns on us that our baby was having parents! We realize that we have been launched on a lifetime relationship of parenting another human being and nothing, least of all our very selves, will ever be the same. As a parent coach I support parents to embrace this reality, accepting the invitation it offers for growth and transformation.

Allow me to share a story from my parent coaching practice that illustrates the ways in which this unique

stream of coaching can help adults go beyond parenting dilemmas and discipline frustrations to create fresh understandings and truly appropriate responses to the many surprises that come from living in relationship with our children.

Carly is a forty-something mother of six children, one of whom (Pete) has been assessed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This is a fairly recent diagnosis, as is typical of many families, only after years of managing, coping, strategizing and puzzling over Pete's endless craving for stimulation and persistent novelty-seeking behavior. Carly and her husband found themselves in the difficult situation of needing to temporarily relinquish their son to a government agency. He was placed in a group home setting, and he and the family received the respite and support necessary to recover some equilibrium and learn new ways of managing the more challenging behaviors.

During our first session, Carly admitted that she was extremely tired—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. She described herself as constantly spinning in circles. Her immediate response to any stress was to get moving in any direction and act quickly to avert disaster. Her hope was that, through parent coaching, she would move forward and beyond the persistent cycle of intense bursts of energy followed by exhaustion. She wanted to exchange her experience of the drudgery and obligations of her life as Mom for greater initiative, enthusiasm and creativity. I assured her that parent coaching was the right vehicle to help her move toward these things and chart a new course. Carly was enthusiastic to begin coaching and demonstrated an incredible willingness to carve out time in her busy life to embark on this adventure.

Beginning with our first coaching session, I took great care to look for and amplify the things that were working in Carly's life and the significant personal strengths that were in evidence. Beneath the many layers of complexity and ensuing chaos that characterized Carly's life there were signs of strength and vitality. By coaxing them out into the light of day, they became recognized and valued. In so doing, they gained equal, if not greater, prominence in her experience and attested to the reality that perception prevails, especially in parenting. As her coach, I could carefully offer Carly a reframe of many seemingly mundane details. For example, when she bemoaned having to confer with Pete's social worker, I affirmed her for recognizing her need for support in parenting and taking action to get it. As difficult as Pete seems to make her life, she retains a deep love and loyalty for him that helps her transcend her disappointment and fears. As she slowly got back in touch with these faded realities, I saw her transform almost immediately! By our second session, she was beginning the conversation with "let me tell you what's working in my life this week..."

The discoveries we made together of the ways in which family life and her parenting were alive and well made it possible for Carly to begin to consider a different future for herself as a mom. Guilt and fear over her handling of past and current parenting challenges were set aside in favor of fresh possibilities based on what she identified as her deep desires for her family. Admittedly, these desires had long been subjugated to the reactive problem solving mode that came to characterize daily life with her children. Yet Carly demonstrated openness to entering the realm of her imagination to explore what a restored sense of confidence

and well being in her life and in her parenting would look like.

This exploration came to be affectionately called the search for “blue sky” and yielded significant information and inspiration for planning strategy and designing further action steps. Midway through this phase of coaching, Carly described to me how she had awakened one morning with a sense that “something inside of her was beginning to grab onto this idea of blue sky.” She reported that she had made a journal entry, an unusual thing for her to do, and “the seeds of these ideas on the page felt good.” At our next coaching session, she read to me her musings about how she perceived her desires as a seed reaching for the sky, still under the blanket of night but reaching up with open hands, ready to receive.

Simultaneous with this, a shift seemed to occur in Carly whereby she became more attuned to her inner experience. Where previously she had been focused on external details and conditions, she was now noticing new attitudes and feelings. She volunteered to me that she was happy to get up most mornings—a very unusual experience for her. She found herself looking forward to a new day precisely because it offered a fresh start.

As she cleared away the kitchen debris, she did so happily and found new ideas gestating within her as she mentally revisited the chaos of the previous evening! She assumed a stance of observer in her own life, allowing her observations to inform her rather than accuse or chastise her. Carly experienced considerable relief in giving herself the time and space needed to reflect on ideas and experiences. Where previously she would have jumped in to fix or salvage a situation, she was now willing to play

the observer and consider a variety of ways to do things differently and better.

It was beautiful to observe Carly give respectful attention to uncomfortable feelings, realizing that they had important things to tell her about herself and her hopes. In coaching, we could explore the uncomfortable feelings further for their potential to reveal deeper longings. In so doing, we discovered that Carly longed to exchange failure and fear for the freedom of recognizing and making choices and increasing confidence and trust—trusting her own growth process along the way.

Carly was subsequently able to identify many key features of her life in the future that were important for her decisions in the present. These included elements like:

- A greater degree of cooperation among family members
- More work getting done around the house and a greater sense of progress towards something better
- Increased financial freedom
- A prevailing rhythm to family life that effectively serves to keep chaos at bay
- Spontaneous, fun and simple family outings
- The end of home schooling with everyone back at school thriving in their education
- Updated professional credentials and a return to satisfying part-time work.

Carly seems to have sprung the next and most active phase of coaching almost organically from the germination of seeds planted during these earlier conversations.



Each week, Carly arrives at coaching having come from a very full life. Household chaos still prevails and new crises erupt with Pete. Yet, she is keen to take just the next step and so that is what we design together. She recognizes this as a departure from her usual way of doing life. In the past she would “bite off way more than she could chew” in the hope of making a radical change. Now she finds herself much more willing to slow down and do just the next thing—finding this a much more easeful way to live.

Still, the list of steps or actions she has designed is impressive. She has initiated and is proceeding with her nursing refresher course; she has successfully transitioned three of her children back into public schools; to the enthusiasm of most of her family, she has begun to hold family meetings and finds them helpful for everyone; she incorporated a holiday for herself into the past summer and recently enjoyed a family getaway weekend in the mountains. She has effectively delegated to Pete the bulk of responsibility for his school performance, and although this translated into him choosing to leave school, he is also happily and gainfully employed!

Parenting takes us to the core of who we are. Parent coaching supports us to become the parent that only we can be. My mission as a parent coach is to facilitate a parent’s journey. It is about helping parents learn about how to parent consciously. I assist parents to align their parenting choices with their best parenting intentions, thereby creating unique responses to the expected and unexpected experiences of family life. Parenting, very simply, is about growth. We are not here to raise our children, to discipline them, to make sure they “turn out” so much as we are here

to grow them up, to grow with them and to be enlarged  
and enlivened by having them in our lives!

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## ***The New Mom***

*In the natural world, a self-identity is critical. Unless genetically altered by humans, the oak tree always stays an oak tree. It doesn't become a willow. Roses are roses and not lilacs. And on it goes for all living systems. Cathy's story points to the heart of coaching to support a strong self-identity, which in turn supports deep self-trust and sound decision-making. Clarity about who we are energizes us, while helping us give our best selves to our children—and to ourselves.*

As an older new mom, Ann didn't know where to turn. All of her friends had school aged children, making it hard for her to relate to the twenty-something moms she met at the park. Feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities of parenting a new baby, Ann was unsure of who she was.

Her son Jack was six weeks old when we first talked. Ann had tried for several years to become pregnant and was told that it may be impossible. After many years of fertility treatments, she and her husband were overjoyed to find that they were expecting. Her pregnancy was challenging, but the first six weeks with Jack had been even harder. Her husband wanted to help, but Jack was nursing and he didn't seem to want his father. Ann felt

scared and alone. She was experiencing a self-described “identity crisis”.

During our first coaching sessions we discussed the idealized vision of having a baby versus the reality of living with and caring for a baby 24/7. I assured Ann that it was normal to feel isolated and scared during this time—it’s like starting a brand new job with absolutely no experience! We talked a lot about grieving the life that she left behind as a busy corporate banker. She used to feel productive with plenty of time for dates with her husband and outings with her friends. Now Ann struggled to incorporate her new identity as parent into her existing life.

I suggested that she schedule a lunch with some of her co-workers so she could reconnect to some of the people she had been missing. At lunch she was quickly brought back to the reality of her old work life—the deadlines, the bickering between co-workers, the competition, and the busyness of it all. She realized that she had romanticized her work life since Jack was born. She was only remembering the long lunches and moments of achievement. She still missed her friends and completing work that she was proud of, but she did not miss the office politics. This reality check helped her let go a little of the past and open up space for her new life as a mom.

She began to understand the importance of grieving what was, before she could move to what is. She felt guilty for missing her old life because she worked so hard and waited so long to have her son. We discussed the burden of guilt and how it drained her energy—energy that she desperately needed so she could care for her son.

At first Ann had difficulty acknowledging her feelings. When she was having a challenging day she often blamed

the people around her. Jack was fussy, her husband wasn't helping, not enough friends were reaching out to her. Her inability to acknowledge her own feelings and how they contributed to her outlook were stifling her ability to move forward. I challenged her to take ownership for how she was feeling rather than look at the people around her. I suggested that she might feel more empowered to know that she has more control over her day than she thinks. If she was feeling unproductive, she could ask for a little help so she could be creative or simply get the laundry done without interruption. If she was feeling lonely she could call a friend to meet for coffee (with Jack in tow!). The first step was acknowledging how she felt—it was an important step toward self-care.

Over time, Ann was able to open up about her feelings. Our coaching sessions helped her process how to productively deal with those strong feelings: guilt, powerlessness, even feelings of invisibility and helplessness. Our talks allowed her to release what she was feeling rather than suppress the emotions. She would often end our session by saying, “I feel free after sharing that.”

As Ann gradually embraced her new role as mom, she shared her concerns regarding her baby. She was worried about a sleep schedule, co-sleeping, nursing, and vaccinations—typical concerns of a first time mom. Ann told me about the stack of books next to her bed and how she was not sure who to believe since all of the advice was different, some of it, even opposing. I affirmed her desire to read and become a knowledgeable parent, but I also advised her to listen to her own inner voice. Since Ann was coming into her new identity as a nurturing, intentional

mother, I could see that she was starting to trust herself more and really embrace what we had been discussing.

I advised her to use the books as reference material, but to really start to focus on what she believed was best for her baby. She wanted to continue nursing, but her mother and many of her friends didn't nurse so she felt confused and unsupported. I encouraged her to find a nursing class or join an organization like La Leche League so she could find peers who shared her beliefs. She found a breast-feeding class at the hospital and felt an instant connection with the nurse who taught the class. She was such an active participant during class that the nurse asked her to help educate expectant mothers on how to prepare for nursing.

This experience was a turning point for Ann. She realized that when you have a passion for something, people will appreciate and recognize this in you. Ann had been identified as a corporate banker for so long she didn't even realize that she may have other expertise to share. At this point I could tell that Ann was fully embracing the coaching experience. She now understood that there was more out there for her—her journey as a mother had just begun and her level of trust in herself and the process was increasing.

Ann's next concern was finding time for her interests, once again. Her confidence as a mother was growing, but she was feeling disconnected from her own needs. We talked about the importance of self-care and how it is essential for her to take care of herself. It's the oxygen mask theory—you must put on your mask before you put on your child's. More energy for her meant more energy for her child. Ann embraced this concept when she realized

that her frustration level with Jack was highest right before her husband came home from work. She was depleted after a long day and she realized that it was essential that she “refuel”. Thirty minutes by herself allowed her to be calm and collected when she put Jack to bed.

With this realization she was inspired to ask her husband to help during the weekend so she could add exercise and alone time into her schedule. Her husband was challenged at first, but once he was able to find his own rhythm with the baby he began to look forward to his time alone with his son. Her husband actually thanked her for carving out the father/son time. He realized that if she hadn’t asked him to be an active participant he might have missed valuable moments with his child. It was then that they realized the importance of co-parenting and they made a goal to share responsibilities as much as possible.

The end of Ann’s story is equally inspiring; Ann now teaches parent/child exercise classes, while continuing to assist with the nursing class. She makes time for her self-care and she has bi-weekly dates with her husband. With her son having celebrated his first birthday, Ann describes herself as a confident mom—not because she knows all the answers, but because she trusts her instincts. She knows who she is as a mother.

Every month or so Ann sends me an e-mail with a picture or story that she is eager to share. She ended her most recent note by saying, “Thank you Cathy for the support, the guidance, and the compassion. I believe I would still be lost if we had not come together. I recently realized that you rarely gave me advice, you just listened to what I had to say and reminded me to trust myself and go in the direction of what feels right. This is a lesson that

will help me in every aspect of my life. This is a lesson I hope to pass on to my son and my next child...I'm not sure how it happened, but I am so excited to tell you that I'm pregnant!"

Cathy Cassani Adams, LCSW, PCI  
Certified Parent Coach®  
Chicago, IL





## **Section Two**

### ***Brain-Compatible Parenting™ Unleashes Creative Energy***

*Even though the 1990s has been heralded as “the decade of the brain,” many parents do not have enough understanding of the recent brain research and how to apply it to parenting challenges. The PCI Coaching Model helps parents translate this important research into practical daily decisions.*

*Parents usually get very excited to see all the positive changes in their children when they intentionally focus on their children’s brain growth. Moms and dads begin to enthusiastically and creatively provide more opportunities for healthy and timely cognitive, emotional, and social development.*

*They also experience more ease in their parenting because when children’s developmental needs are met, many struggles disappear, along with parents’ worries and anxieties.*



## ***Building Parental Confidence with Brain-Compatible Parenting Techniques***

*Barb's story clearly illustrates how parental confidence increases when attending to children's developmentally appropriate needs. The result for this couple—"...calm and joy in our daily lives."*

I have always loved Donna like a daughter. Donna and Jack are wonderful parents, but felt that something was missing in their parenting and their relationships with their children. They wanted “to relax and enjoy our children; have a respectful, loving relationship with our children; and be able to spend more time together as a couple as well as a family.” They felt that in order to do this, they needed to understand more about the developmental ages and stages of both of their children. They wanted the children to learn from situations and still develop a positive self-image and a sense of responsibility. Thus begins the story of Donna and Jack’s journey to their dream for their family.

The end of the story of their dream was about three months later when I received a letter from Donna that stated, “Our experience with you, as our parent coach, has been so helpful in bringing calm and joy to our daily lives.”

Now you have the beginning and the end, but the most important part of the story is the middle. How did Donna, Jack, and I get to their preferred future? How did we bring their dream to reality?

Both Donna and Jack are professionals who work full time. Donna and Jack have been married for seven years and have a very stable, happy marriage. They are both in their early thirties and have two delightful children: Carol who is six-years-old and Freddie who is four-years-old. Carol is in first grade, and Freddie attends preschool. They live in a middle class, family-oriented community.

Donna and Jack both working full time meant that we needed to have our coaching sessions in the evenings. They were concerned that they expected too much from their children. They also felt that they gave consequences that were out of proportion to the children’s actions. Donna and Jack wanted to stop constantly telling the children “No,” and to develop more positive responses to them. Through coaching, this couple developed positive responses that they now use with their children. In developing a significant parenting strategy, we discussed some of the latest brain research.

We know that the brain downshifts into the reptilian brain, which induces a “fight or flight” reaction when we are stressed, angry or in danger. Instead of discussing an incident immediately, if Donna or Jack feel angry or they know that Freddie or Carol is angry, they now go to a thinking area and Freddie or Carol will go to another thinking area.

Thinking areas were set up by Donna and Jack with the children's input. These are places where they feel safe and can think about what has just happened. When everyone is calmer and thinking in their cortex or higher levels of their brains, then the situation can be discussed and the children can learn from the incident.

Another positive method Donna and Jack are using with the children is asking the question, "Please tell me what happened?" When asking this question, they are not assuming the child is guilty of anything. They are asking for information and listening deeply to the situation from their child's perception. The question they previously used which many parents use is, "Why did you do...?" which tends to assume guilt. Asking what happened will still give Donna and Jack the answer to why the child did what they did plus much more information to assist them in solving the issue.

Donna and Jack did share many times when they felt they could have handled a situation better. In sharing those times, I learned that they spent a great deal of time with Carol and Freddie. I reflected back to them how important this time was to their children and how wonderful it was that they found time in their busy schedules to do this; it demonstrated how seriously they took their job of parenting. To reinforce this, I also shared with them a quote on page 70 of *Parenting Well in a Media Age*, by Gloria DeGaetano, which states, "The more parents lovingly interact with young children and model active participation in the natural world, the greater the chances that the youngster will develop more of his or her capacity." Both Donna and Jack were thrilled to know this.

Donna and Jack wanted to learn more about the ages and stages of development and what the characteristics of the

different stages meant in relationship to Carol and Freddie and parenting them. We spent several coaching sessions working on these concepts. In looking at the developmental characteristics of a four-year-old and a six-year-old, they could see that both Freddie and Carol's behaviors were normal for their ages.

One of Donna and Jack's most upsetting situations with the children was that they did not seem to be listening to what they were being asked to do. However, after looking at the developmental characteristics of children Carol and Freddie's ages, we discovered that in all likelihood they were listening, but the way the directions were being given, they did not understand what they should do. Donna and Jack felt that understanding the developmental characteristics of children their age assisted them in understanding how to interact appropriately with their children and to have more realistic expectations.

An example of this occurred mid-way through our coaching. Donna came to our session upset with Carol. She had asked Carol to pick up her (Carol's) barrettes and put them away. Carol did exactly what Donna asked. However, Donna's barrettes were right next to Carol's, and Carol had not put them away. Donna was upset, because Carol had not put her barrettes away, too. Donna felt hurt that Carol had not wanted to help her. When I explained that six-year-olds are concrete thinkers and had Donna asked Carol to put away both of their barrettes, Carol would have done so. Donna wanted to know more about concrete thinkers. I explained that at six years of age, children did not generalize. Also, to them black is black and white is white. They do not understand gray areas. This made sense to Donna; it helped her to understand how to state directions for Carol so that

Carol could understand and follow them in the way that Donna expected.

Donna realized that understanding the characteristics of children at each age would be very helpful in her relationship to her children. In our last session I could see the loving interactions of Jack and Donna with Carol and Freddie. As I watched I had tears in my eyes, because I had been a small part of these wonderful interactions and the transformational changes that have occurred.

Our family still sees Donna and Jack, so every once in a while I get a call with a question about parenting. The calls would begin, “What should I do?” My answer would be, “First, tell me what you think you should do?” Donna and Jack now knew what to do. They just needed reassurance that they were doing the right thing. Then the calls began, “We think we should do...” All I had to do was affirm their great ideas and choices. Now I no longer get the calls. I miss the calls, but I’m so proud of Donna and Jack. Their dream has come to fruition.

Barbara J. Bushey  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
South Lyon, MI



## ***A Mother's Self-Care is a Powerful Example***

*An experienced mother discovers the wonders and gifts in self-care as a powerful model for her son's healthy development.*

I have been coaching a very dynamic woman that is parenting a seven-year-old boy that she and her husband adopted. Marie is an experienced parent, having grown children and stepchildren that she has parented with good results. She is an articulate and assertive person, is very organized and is always crossing things off of her “to do” list. She wants coaching because her young son is having many difficulties socially and behaviorally at home and at school. She has sought counseling for the boy and herself, occupational therapy for the boy for sensory processing problems, private tutoring for academics and has worked closely with the school. She had appointments with many experts and specialists, trying to learn what was going on with her son and how to help him. When I first talked with her, I wondered what I could possibly help her do that she hadn't already done. After spending time with her, that question answered itself.

When I began questioning her about self-care, she was initially impatient. She was so busy, and she was “just



fine.” She just wanted to focus on the issues she was having with her son. I let the topic drop for a while, but found ways to weave it into our conversation without calling it “self-care.” At the end of our first session, she asked for homework from me. She had made a list of things she wanted to accomplish during the week. I told her that I would be looking forward to hearing about everything she was planning to do. I also asked her to think of just one nice thing she could do for herself in the way of homework from me. She chose to read a novel that has interested her for some time, but that she hadn’t started because she was reading parenting books and ones specific to her son’s issues.

The next week we went over her list, and I affirmed her for all she had done for her son. We talked about an appointment with a specialist, her son’s therapy and the therapist’s recommendations, and then she mentioned what had happened with her self-care assignment. When her son saw her reading a book that was different from what she usually read, he asked her about it. She explained that she wanted to read just to enjoy the story and the characters and that it was a relaxing break for her. He thought for a moment and then said (paraphrasing here) that she worked much harder than the other moms he knew and that he knew he was a difficult kid because of the books she usually read. He then went and got his own book that he usually resisted reading and asked if he could sit with her and read his book.

Marie realized that he had not had a role model that read for pleasure. She was close to tears when telling me this. She and her son have now developed a routine of reading side-by-side and sharing what they read with each other. He is looking forward to a formerly dreaded chore,

and she is sharing some wonderful time with him along with doing a nice thing for herself.

There is so much to appreciate with this model! What an important gift I was able to help Marie give to herself and her son. The beauty of this coaching model is that the client calls the shots and takes credit for all of his/her work. The coach shares in the joy of the progress, but the coach is just a catalyst.

Through our coaching, Marie discovered how important it is to think about her own needs. She is now relaxing into being the mother she wants to be. By slowing down her frantic pace, she is more relaxed and better able to focus on her son.

After each coaching session she always asks for homework. We both laugh because she already has in mind what she wants to do for self-care. Marie has experienced firsthand how her self-care serves as a powerful model to her son. At the PCI, we call this the “paradox of self-care.” On face value, it seems that by taking care of ourselves, we will have less time for our children. In fact, the opposite is true. Marie was game to try self-care and be open to its wonder. She is an amazing person, and I feel so fortunate to be a part of the coaching process with her.

Ruth Williams  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Kirkland, WA



## ***From “Disneyland Dad” to “Authentic Self” Dad***

*Connecting with our children authentically is often the way we begin to fully meet their developmental needs, as Connie’s story beautifully demonstrates.*

Jeff contacted me about parent coaching after the Guardian ad Litem assigned to his divorce case had suggested a parent coach might be helpful. When we began our coaching relationship, he was very stressed about his situation. As a father of three children, a nine-year-old daughter and six-year-old boy/girl twins, his main goal was to build a strong relationship with his children regardless of where they physically lived. He was hopefully approaching the end of a long and contentious divorce and expressed deep concern about how this was affecting his children emotionally.

The vision he held for his family was one where communication is functioning at its highest level in an atmosphere that invites true freedom of expression, effective listening, clear understanding and appropriate follow through. He wanted to learn “how to parent correctly.” I was impressed by his earnest desire to offer the best of himself in order to create a solid family structure in the midst of chaos.

The current visitation schedule gave Jeff the ability to be with his children every Wednesday afternoon until 7:30PM as well as every other weekend. Our weekly coaching sessions were scheduled for Monday evenings. I soon began to detect a pattern of high energy and excitement during the sessions that took place immediately after a weekend with his children. The alternate sessions seemed to be occupied with complaints and anxiety-ridden tales about his wife and the latest accusations she was presenting. Making him aware of this obvious shift in energy on our weekly calls caused him to become more mindful about his expenditure of energy so to be able to focus more on his relationship with his children.

Jeff described his oldest daughter, Lilly, as sweet, smart and caring. She was uneasy with conflict and did her best to avoid it. His younger daughter, Myra, had always been independent and perceptive with a compassionate nature. Since she did not verbalize her feelings enough Jeff wondered what the long-term consequences would be of always stuffing her thoughts and desires. Myra's twin brother, Reece, challenged the family with his strong will, cleverness and intuitive mind. In the last three years, Reece's behavior had become somewhat difficult. Other referred to him as "bad." Consequently Jeff worried that Reece would come to see himself as such.

Guiding Jeff to focus on the things that were working in his life with the children was difficult to maintain at first; yet, in doing so, he began to visualize a new possibility and was able to start painting a portrait of his ultimate family vision. His perception of himself as a capable and effective parent began to grow as we identified his predominant parenting style and explored his obvious strengths.

Jeff's heart-centered approach to his parenting was very apparent to me from the beginning. Sensitivity to his children's feelings was one of Jeff's greatest strengths that he was not yet fully aware of. He constantly made statements about his desire to "be in tune with my kids' feelings" and his nurturing style made him very perceptive to and concerned about the children's moods and emotions. In addition, his intuitive and practical side was always very alert to the significance the environment played in their well-being.

By helping Jeff to analyze what really worked to make the children happy, he was able to put aside his self-imposed pressure to be a "Disneyland Dad": always having to do something or spend money to have fun with his children. He gradually began to trust his authentic self more, rather than doing things he thought his children wanted him to do. His heightened awareness and attentive observation skills led him to discover that just being together or taking a walk was often enough for them.

Jeff gradually became reacquainted with the wonderful parenting skills that had always existed within him. Coaching guided him to alter his perspective and acquire a new consciousness about expending his energies where they mattered most—to connect with his children to be better able to address their developmental needs.

In working to help Jeff experience his strong suits of empathy and intuition, he soon began to see evidence of these qualities in himself. He shared a story of a time when his son was embarrassed by a conversation they were having as a family. As a result, his self-conscious attitude was preventing him from speaking and entering into the conversation. Jeff responded intuitively by suggesting his son squeeze his finger once for 'no' and twice for 'yes' as an

alternative means of communication. I immediately pointed out to him that his intuitive side brought out a discerning flexibility in approaching challenges, and his empathic side portrayed genuine respect for his son's feeling of embarrassment.

Human bonding is a process of connecting to others through interactions that lead to unique attachments and establishes emotional trust, mutual respect, security and love. Jeff knew this on an intuitive level and his actions clearly exemplified his desire to make vital connections with his children. As I was able to reinforce such actions by pointing out the benefits to his children's emotional development, Jeff was better able to recognize the enormous gains that come from bonding with one's children. The term "making a connection" resonated with him. He began to see every interaction with his children as an opportunity to either connect or disconnect with them.

During our seventh session Jeff excitedly informed me that he had recently taken a walk with Myra and intentionally left room in their conversation for her to speak. Things were quiet at first but soon she started asking him questions and then began to talk about her feelings regarding the divorce—something she had never done before. Just before they arrived back at home she turned to him and said, "Thanks for listening Dad" and gave him a big hug. The joy in his voice was evident when he told me, "I not only knew I had made a deep connection this time, I could feel it."

The icing on the cake came for Jeff when he attended parent-teacher conferences for his twins. The teacher provided Jeff with some of the twins' work samples and writing folder. As Jeff perused the stories he discovered

they wrote about family life with him at his house, tears of joy welled up inside him. Reading their accounts of the fun they had being at dad's house because they did fun things like go to the park, look at family picture albums and snuggle on the couch, he received powerful affirmation for his parenting. He realized in this seminal moment that he knows his children well and that he is giving them what they need to develop optimally. The excitement, joy and pride in his voice resounded so clearly as he described this experience, confirming my sense that the children—indeed the entire family—was definitely going to thrive.

Connie Hammer  
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Round Pond, ME



## ***Understanding the Needs of a Four-Year-Old***

*Alice's story beautifully shows that when parents understand the developmental needs of their child; they can adjust their parenting accordingly, allowing the child to thrive while making way for much more ease and family satisfaction.*

Mike and Laura came to coaching ready to pull their hair out over their four-year-old daughter's confrontational behavior. Dad was frustrated with how difficult it was to move Anna along in the day as he tried to accomplish various and necessary tasks. Mom woke up each morning "ready for a fight" and often got one. Anna was ending up in time outs in her bedroom daily, usually throwing tantrums and resisting all peace offerings. Her confrontational behavior began appearing even at her preschool, which is when Mike and Laura decided it was time to get some guidance.

Our first conversation was filled with their frustrations, the confusion as to why their usually sweet daughter was being such a tyrant, and wondering whether they were bad parents. Teasing out what was working for them amplified



the importance of a relaxing schedule, allowing them to give Anna the focused time she needed. As we talked, their frustration gave way to softly expressed joy as they described Anna's strengths: she loves to be read to, she has an excellent attention span, is independent, loves to cook and eat, is loving and affectionate, self-directed, perseveres through challenges, and is quietly observant. A beautiful list of her positive qualities had emerged!

Affirming their daughter's exuberant independence (and the conflicts this can bring!) allowed me to clarify for them the needs of four-year-olds: expanded competence and increased autonomy. Hearing this acknowledgment of their daughter's developmental stage gave Mike and Laura an opportunity to think about how they already are supporting her as an autonomous and competent soul. They began to fully understand how the more she tests them, the more she is crying out for greater independence. Hearing how the tone of our talk evolved from doubts, anxieties, frustrations and even anger, to a softer, more thoughtful tone was so rewarding. Both Mike and Laura ended the call feeling relieved and hopeful that no, they weren't bad parents, and yes, they are in a challenging place—and they have an amazing little girl. They agreed to spend the next week paying attention to each other's strengths and to look for opportunities to give Anna's wings a little spreading room.

Their second week of coaching brought more moments that worked because they had stayed focused on increasing Anna's autonomy. However, one morning she woke up truly whiny and demanding and wanted them to come to her room rather than her usual habit of joining them in bed. Laura and Mike held their ground, letting Anna know she

was welcome to come to them. Things escalated. Laura and Mike wondered how, with all the extra opportunities they've given her for independence, could she be like this? Reframing this situation into a little girl doing her best to exert control over her life—true autonomy—gave Mike and Laura the opportunity to shift their perspective. As we continued to talk, they realized how most mornings go quite well with Anna, and that perhaps that particular morning would have looked different with a different response from them. Guess what? The next week they shared how they had really mulled that over, changing how they respond to Anna's morning grumpiness—and Anna graced them with a changed response herself—she pleasantly asked them to come to her room, and so they gladly did.

Understanding the enormity and significance of their job as parents, Laura and Mike brought commitment, honesty, and openness to each of our coaching calls. They had lots to share about the things that were working for them: Anna happily demonstrating her competence in dressing, mornings going more smoothly, mom starting to relax into not waking “ready for a fight,” and Anna responding positively as a result.

Success built upon success. New insights continued to emerge. One in particular began a domino effect of positive changes. Laura realized that it was difficult for her when an entire weekend went by without truly focused time with Anna. Tears flowed over the loss Laura felt by allowing distractions to dictate her time. One of our coaching calls focused on the gift this brought her: the realization of the importance of being fully present to Anna.

Plans were made to take advantage of “fully present” opportunities—awareness was called upon to notice what

kind of being “fully present” fueled Laura (and Anna!) the best. These beginning steps created a landslide of change. Anna could count on more focused mommy time and lovely interactions unfolded for them. Anna became more willing to do things that needed to be done; Laura, by successfully putting work distraction aside to allow for being “fully present” with Anna, found it easier to use humor rather than anger when challenges arose; playtimes evolved from specific plans to open-ended adventures; confrontations subsided, grins took their place, and creativity took over. Anna began playing contentedly on her own more than ever before. And Mike and Laura found more time to accomplish tasks during the day.

Mike and Laura continued to grow specific steps that ultimately brought even more positive changes for them. Mike found his ability to stay “in the moment” simplified his life, helped him prioritize more clearly, and graced him with experiencing life with his family fully and deeply. Laura developed her own “filter” to prioritize requests of her time and to be able say “No,” keeping her obligations manageable. Anna flourished under the focused attention she received from her more relaxed parents. Disagreements didn’t escalate into tantrums—fueling Mike and Laura’s confidence in the parenting choices they were making. Their tension was gone. More ease permeated their family conversations. The joy they expressed on our final calls warmed my heart. How rewarding it is to know that a family is blooming so beautifully!

At the end of coaching Laura and Mike shared they would “never go back” to their old ways. They now felt they had the resilience to be patient and the time to be more attentive to Anna. They were relishing the joy in all that

they were doing. Laura and Mike's marriage felt stronger, their family life richer, and Anna, formerly a troublesome four-year-old, was now a thriving little girl, well on her way to autonomy.

Alice Hanscam  
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## ***With Sleep Everything Looks Different***

*Like Alice's story, Joy's story vividly demonstrates that when parents understand the developmental needs of their youngsters, positive changes take place...but first, parents need enough sleep to deal proactively with parenting challenges!*

A couple came to me because they were concerned about their strong-willed three-year-old's behavior. Their daughter, Sarah, was, as most three-year-olds are, energetic and striving for more independence. The way they were dealing with this was extremely different than how I would have dealt with it. I even considered suggesting that I might not be the best coach for them. But I am so glad that I didn't.

We started by exploring situations where Sarah behaved respectfully. We looked at these situations from many angles and discovered that things went best when everyone was well rested. This doesn't seem like a huge revelation, but this simple discovery started the family making small changes that changed the atmosphere in their home completely, allowing this dedicated couple to focus on their daughter's

developmental needs in a more relaxed state. Self-care is often a difficult topic for parents. We are all so used to sacrificing for our children. We all seem to believe that this makes us good parents. Sacrifice is part of parenting, but taking care of yourself gives you the energy to parent thoughtfully and intentionally.

Mom was a nurse who worked part time, second shift. When she worked she often got only a few hours of sleep. When she realized how her ability to parent calmly was connected to the amount of sleep she got, she started planning for quieter afternoons on the day after she worked. Occasionally she hired a babysitter to take over at this time, so that she could nap. She also reduced the number of hours she worked when possible.

Dad was organized and disciplined, yet laid back and funny. Dad liked naps and used naps to reenergize whenever possible. These changes allowed them to see Sarah's behavior differently and remain calm even when she wasn't.

We also investigated Sarah's sleep habits. As we looked at Sarah's behavior and what was positively affecting her, they could see that her changing sleep patterns affected her behavior a great deal. She had recently discontinued her nap, and the evening was the time when most of the behavior struggles occurred.

In the short term they found that some afternoon quiet time and an earlier bedtime alleviated many of the evening struggles. In the long term, they committed to making continual adjustments to Sarah's schedule as her needs for sleep changed. This was another simple, yet important change they made. Ensuring that everyone got adequate sleep brought greater calm and control to their household, but it did not alleviate all the issues.

Sarah, as three-year-olds will, continued to assert her need for independence, often disrespectfully. As the parents described how they dealt with various discipline situations, they explained that they felt better about themselves, their relationship with Sarah and the outcome when they remained calm in dealing with Sarah. When they remained in control, things did not escalate and they did not say things they regretted. At this point in the coaching, mom and dad could see the benefits to remaining calm in these situations, but they still found it difficult at times. They tended to give multiple warnings and then become frustrated and lash out.

We discussed what they could do instead of multiple warnings. Mom realized in looking at various incidents that she found it easier to remain calm the less she said, so we came up with counting to three and a specific consequence when she reached three. During our next call mom described using the technique. She was pleased with how she had calmly dealt with Sarah's disrespect. She felt confident and especially happy that this way of dealing with things kept the connection with her daughter intact. In the past, Sarah would avoid and act hurt toward the parent who had corrected her. Happily this was no longer happening. This big change in Sarah, along with the parents' higher energy levels and commitment to remain calm, truly changed the atmosphere in their home. They felt in control of themselves. Now they were able to appreciate their preschooler's growing independence.

In our last two conversations, I noticed a distinct difference in mom and dad's demeanor. They were both very relaxed and content. I asked them to reflect on our work together and what they had gained as a result. They

had made numerous changes, small and large, which had changed the atmosphere of their home. Their understanding of the developmental needs of preschoolers had grown and with it their confidence. Their ability to tune into Sarah's specific needs will serve them well throughout Sarah's life. Parenting now with more confidence, they could meet their daughter's developmental needs, especially when they both had enough sleep!

Joy Wilds  
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## ***Family Happiness with Healthy Teen Development***

*When children enter the teen years, we can easily feel adrift, “out of our element”, especially if we understand normal child development better than teen development. Through coaching, Kay carefully helped Diane apply a model she knew about child development, to help her better understand and appreciate her fifteen-year-old. It is a powerful story, demonstrating how important brain-compatible parenting is during adolescence.*

As I often do with my clients, I invited Diane to send me a photo of her family. It is always interesting to see what each client chooses—sometimes a formal family portrait or a few candid snapshots. Over the years, the photos have rarely arrived electronically, but more often padded in envelopes, showing evidence of great care. When the envelopes arrive, I am always excited to catch a glimpse of the relationships within the family, and to connect the faces with the voices that I intently listen to during weekly coaching phone calls.

When Diane contacted me, she expressed a desire to improve her relationship with her fifteen-year-old stepdaughter, Emma. Over the years the family had been to all kinds of counselors, and Diane said, “I am just so tired of being the family nag.” When Diane read about parent coaching in a leading women’s magazine, she said that she finally felt hopeful that there might be another way.

Diane described Emma as moody and sometimes withdrawn, behaviors that Diane did not recall exhibiting during her own teen years. She expressed that Emma’s personality and outlook on life were the polar opposite of hers. To complicate things, most of Diane’s parenting revolved around her three preschool-aged children, and she recognized that both she and Emma had largely just coexisted in the house for eight years. Diane felt frustrated parenting a teen one moment and a two-year-old the next, leaving her to wonder if she was really any good at parenting at all. At one point Diane said, “I didn’t sign up for this life.”

When Diane’s envelope containing her family photo arrived, I was excited to open it, since we had already had a few coaching calls. As I slid out the photo I saw that the family portrait only captured five people in it: Diane, her husband, and their three biological children. In that moment I felt struck by Emma’s absence.

During our weekly calls Diane spoke about feeling more competent in parenting her three younger children than in parenting Emma. I asked why she thought this, and she said, “...because my parenting has evolved with their growth, and I have a good understanding of their development. I’ve also read about the ages and stages, and I have lots of opportunity to connect with other moms who have young children.”

So then I asked Diane if she could think of ways to apply a similar model to enhance her understanding of Emma's development. Diane shared how she was aware that there were books on parenting teens, and that perhaps she could attend more of Emma's school events, providing her with an opportunity to meet other parents of teens. It was through acknowledging one successful pattern in her parenting that Diane then saw opportunities to make a shift toward parenting Emma with greater understanding and support.

Our coaching connection continued to evolve, and Diane began to visualize and articulate the relationship she sought to have with Emma. She said, "I just don't want to be a nag all the time, and I want to have one of those good mother-daughter relationships, where we could do something together." It was nice to hear that Diane saw the value of connecting with Emma and that she recognized that doing something together would lay the foundation for adding shared memories and some fun to their relationship. I asked Diane, "What might this look and feel like?" Diane listed some of Emma's interests and it was clear that she and Emma, even in all their differences, actually had a couple of common interests. Taking time to do something fun with Emma also meant that Diane would be creating an opportunity for her husband to have more time with their younger children.

In the following weeks, Diane strengthened her vision of her relationship with Emma. She asked, "But what if the vision doesn't come true?" and I replied, "Dream big, because even if your vision doesn't occur to the extent you imagined, it will still be an injection of something positive in your family system." So Diane's vision consisted of going to the local craft shop, once or twice a month, to participate

in a craft activity with Emma, riding at the stable once a month together and then also connecting with her husband to create a “family night” at home. She also wanted to create opportunities for Emma to interact with the younger children, and “family night” seemed like a good way to do this.

To Diane’s surprise, just after three weeks of instituting family night, she overheard Emma talking with a friend and explaining that she couldn’t come over, because Thursday was their “tradition” of family night. Family night had a ripple effect in Diane’s household as her husband, who had a home-based business, realized he had been working too much. Diane’s dream was becoming her reality, and the negativity that had been her primary focal point was shifting toward positive parenting experiences and enhanced ways to connect and build shared memories, especially with Emma.

Recognizing that Diane was juggling a lot with work and family, I invited Diane to monitor when she felt she parented best. I also asked her when she felt the most joy in her parenting. It was during these conversations that Diane said, “I never realized that I had so many options for how I parent; we were really stuck in a rut here.”

On their own accord, Diane and her husband decided to write some parenting goals, recognizing that it had been unrealistic to think that they could “do it all.” I suggested that Diane and her husband create a positive feedback loop within the family, making it a point to verbally acknowledge when they were aware that things were going well. With each weekly call, Diane’s positive energy around her family increased, and it was clear that she and her husband were now successfully creating a different family feel and focus.

Shortly after our final call, I received an envelope from Diane. It had all the telltale signs of being a photograph, and I was excited to see what she had sent. As I opened the flap, I saw that there were several photos enclosed, one of the entire family, including Emma, and then a candid shot of Emma and Diane throwing pots at their local craft studio. They were side-by-side, their eyes brightly shining, and laughter abundant. I knew in that moment that Diane's parenting vision was now her reality.

Kay Gruder  
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## ***Giving a Teen the Gift of Autonomy***

*The mother in this story learns through the coaching process to authentically appreciate her teen's need for autonomy, giving her "the keys and letting her drive her own bus."*

When I first began to coach Rebecca, she had remarried and recently given birth to her fourth child. She had three children from a previous marriage that included two daughters and a son. Her child with her second husband was also a boy. Her second marriage to Mark was comfortable and easy but did not completely fulfill Rebecca. She lacked the support in raising the children as Mark seldom assumed the role of parent. Rebecca was alone in raising her three oldest children because Mark was only interested in caring for their youngest son. While he remained friendly with all the children, he never became a father figure in their eyes. It was always left to Rebecca to assume the duties of parenting as well as household management.

Rebecca was looking for ways to bring positive energy back into her life. She wanted to discover ways in which she could expand the potential of each of her children while not

losing her identity in the process. For this story, I will tell you what happened with Amanda, her oldest child.

Amanda had great potential but glided through life without direction or focus. However, she was a tremendous help to her mother by babysitting and driving the younger children to and from school and activities. Rebecca described her as positive, smart, and resourceful, with an appreciation for the simple things in life. Despite living in a town that puts tremendous pressure on acquisitions and wealth, Amanda was not caught up in the “must haves.” She is grounded in her ideals and beliefs and does not feel pressure to conform to others’ expectations.

Rebecca felt Amanda’s enormous potential but would often express discontent with her lack of motivation and underperformance at school. Rebecca believed Amanda was more capable than she was allowing herself to be, and this frustrated her enormously. In fact, Rebecca’s feelings had become so negative that she was physically and emotionally pulling away from her daughter. It was an ongoing battle between the both of them with no resolution in sight.

Rebecca told of an incident in which she had registered Amanda (a senior in high school at the time) for a summer school session at a prestigious university that would introduce her to subjects such as criminal justice and forensics. It was a unique opportunity for a high school student as she would be able to spend a few weeks away from home and sample life in a collegiate setting. However, Rebecca did not ask Amanda’s opinion about taking the course, but simply mailed the tuition and sent her off to school. Rebecca’s hope was that it would open opportunities to Amanda that she may not have previously considered. And, she hoped it would allow Amanda to develop some maturity and inspire her to

set higher goals in her education. But, this was not Amanda's dream; it was her mother's. And, because she sensed her mother's strong intention in wanting her to be there, she was hesitant to share her real feelings. Since Amanda was not committed to the program, she didn't apply herself, and when she received her grade report at the end of the term, she had failed. She came home to a mother who was bitterly disappointed and angry. Rebecca's reaction was to distance herself from her daughter. For the once close pair, this was especially difficult for Amanda. She was hurt and confused by her mother's withdrawal. And, Rebecca was too upset to explain to Amanda why she had pulled away.

I felt this was a perfect situation in which we could practice "reframing" and search for the positive. It was a challenge for Rebecca because her feelings of disappointment towards Amanda were incredibly strong. I asked Rebecca to consider a time in Amanda's past where she excelled and asked her to describe her feelings as she remembered the incident. After a few minutes, she began to speak with pride about Amanda's ability to help her at home. Amanda was always available to her mother should she need her to watch the children, run to the store, drive Matt to soccer or simply help with dinner. She began to replace her feelings of disappointment with ones of gratitude and genuine pride. She realized Amanda was invaluable to her ability to juggle work and home.

And, while recounting these memories, Rebecca realized that Amanda never complained. She always seemed willing and eager to help around the house and never had to be coerced or hounded into it. While in this appreciative mode, we went back to discussing the summer school incident. I asked Rebecca to explain why



she was so disappointed and share her feelings. While it was important to address the negative feelings she had surrounding the incident, it was equally important to let them go and replace them with positive thoughts. Rebecca accepted that the decision to attend the summer program was based on her expectations for her daughter and not Amanda's choice or desires. She realized she had put tremendous pressure on Amanda to attend without considering her ambivalence about the decision. Amanda had tried to express to her mother that she did not want to go, but at the time Rebecca did not listen or recognize the cues. She simply thought Amanda was being lazy and simply not applying herself. And, because Amanda knew this was her mother's desire, she had not persisted beyond her initial objections.

Rebecca realized that Amanda had tried to share her feelings about her resistance to going but that she could not allow herself to accept it. Instead, she had allowed her expectations to exceed the potential of the situation. But there was more insight to be gleaned. When Rebecca thought about the entire experience, she discovered something that she had previously overlooked. While Amanda had not done well from a grades standpoint, she did emerge from the experience with more maturity. There was a benefit from Amanda's exposure to the program that Rebecca had not anticipated. By refocusing her attention on those times in Amanda's past where she excelled, she began to rebuild the relationship with her daughter and let go of her disappointment. From this point forward, she began to compliment the positive actions her daughter made and in turn watched Amanda transform into a more confident and capable child.

I explained to Rebecca that she could not continue to live her children's lives for them. It was essential that her children be allowed to make their choices in life and deal with the consequences. And, that growth and learning come from failure and not to discount its importance in our lives. I told Rebecca, "Give Amanda the keys to the bus and let her drive." It was her life to control, her responsibility to choose and deal with consequence. If Rebecca continued to make choices for her daughter, she would actually be doing her a disservice.

Through the coaching process Rebecca realized her strength and personal power by giving Amanda important keys to her own life.

At one of our last sessions, Rebecca shared with me the happiness she felt in her new life. She was joyful and content with the direction her life was headed and recognized the work it had taken for her to get to this point. Her relationship with Amanda had dramatically improved. The young woman attends a college that was of her own choosing, pursuing academic studies of her own interests, and doing extremely well both socially and academically.

Rebecca was smiling and her eyes sparkled with happiness. It was a glorious moment! And for as much as Rebecca was transformed, so was I because through our coaching, I challenged myself and grew as a coach. Rebecca and I have created a bond that will remain with us for the remainder of our lives. I couldn't ask for a greater gift.

Gina Harlow-Mote  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Dallas, TX



## ***Tantrums with a Purpose***

*When children are out of control it can be scary and exhausting—for the parents and the child. Rhoda's story shows the power of coaching to help parents get to the core cause and from there, move forward with positive results.*

Susan and David have four children. They chose to participate in coaching because Jessica, their eight-year-old adopted daughter, had frequent emotional outbursts, so severe that the parents couldn't calm her down. She was receiving medication for ADHD that helped her behavior in school. By the time she got home from school, the medication was wearing off and homework became an enormous hassle. In addition, all four children participated in multiple after school programs—an organizational challenge for everyone. The parents knew they had to do something, they just didn't know what.

These two articulate parents had no trouble identifying Jessica's many strengths. She was extremely independent, not competitive, a great artist, and athletic to name a few. Yet these positives were overshadowed by her inability to express frustration at home in an acceptable manner. Once she exploded, it could take hours to calm her down.

Sometimes she even missed school due to this behavior because she was exhausted from the ordeal. Also, Susan and David didn't want her teacher to have to deal with the fallout from the tantrum. The interesting thing about Jessica's meltdowns was that they never occurred in school. During our coaching, Susan and David's first "ah-ha" moment occurred when they realized that all tantrums were localized to family interactions.

Susan and David had a variety of techniques to soothe Jessica: rubbing her back and arms, helping her breathe, walking, writing, drawing, and really listening to her all helped a little. A few of these worked sometimes, yet nothing worked consistently. Even though the parents dropped everything to focus on Jessica and help her calm down, more likely than not she would still have a major and debilitating tantrum. They wanted so much for their daughter to be able to deal with frustration in an acceptable manner.

During one session they shared the story of an event that had happened while driving all four children to various after school activities. Each child had to be somewhere and David was the designated driver. As they prepared to zoom off, Jessica, who was sitting in the back, announced that she wanted to ride shotgun, and if she didn't she would "lose it." David took a chance and told Jessica that if she lost it she wouldn't ride shotgun for a week. Jessica sat in the back and whimpered. David ignored the behavior until she was calm, and there was no tantrum. After David shared his story I asked him if he realized the significance of this event. David had gotten to the root of the tantrums; Jessica was making a conscious choice to escalate to tantrum level so that she could get what she wanted.

At our next session these parents were ecstatically happy. They had realized that they were not in charge of deescalating Jessica's tantrums; Jessica was totally in charge. She could choose to have a tantrum or control herself. The choice was hers. This immediately turned the tables in this family.

When Susan saw her gearing up for an explosion, she quietly pointed out that Jessica had a choice. She could choose to scream and yell or could accept the alternative she had been offered. Gradually, Jessica began to see that she couldn't get her way by creating havoc in the family. The frequency and intensity of her tantrums decreased. Jessica stopped missing school due to tantrums. The family stopped walking on eggshells, worried that their every move would start a volcanic eruption.

From our coaching sessions, Susan and David learned the purpose of their daughter's tantrums. Once that was known, I was able to help them design effective strategies to support the girl's healthy development. My work with Susan and David demonstrated once again that the coaching relationship brings out the best in parents and that, in turn, brings out the best in their children.

Rhonda Moskowitz  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Columbus, OH



## ***Positive Changes Endure***

*The investment of hard work we put in to support our children's optimal development, pays dividends as the years pass. Peggy's story shows that positive results from coaching endure the test of time.*

I was at my daughter's soccer game one day in the spring when I met a mom who was reading a Jane Healy book. I love Jane Healy, so we struck up a conversation on brain development and whether it was possible to "rewire" a brain. During the conversation, I mentioned that I was a parent coach, at which time she looked at me and said, "Boy, do I need you," and a relationship was born.

I found out that Nancy and her husband Bob were teachers, and both worked full time. They had started the adoption process with two boys, Jack and a Jim, a year ago. They were three and four at the time, and they had been in nine foster homes before they came to live with Nancy and Bob. Both were diagnosed with emotional problems. They were now four and five, and Nancy felt strongly that she was at the end of her rope. She did not know what to do or where to turn. She felt that the boys' behavior was out of control both at home and at school. They did not listen, they were defiant to their teachers

and their parents, they had violent temper tantrums and the children in Jack's pre-school were afraid of him.

Nancy and Bob had tried disciplining the boys by taking toys and privileges away from them, by talking with them, and even by sending them to bed without dinner; nothing seemed to be working.

Nancy knew that deep down the boys had warm hearts, and she wanted desperately to find a way to bring that out in them. She knew that there had to be a way to do that, but at this point she and Bob were out of ideas. Nancy's dream was to have a calm and cooperative household, for her and Bob to be working on the same page when it came to the boys, and for other people to be able to see the good in Jack and Jim.

During our coaching, both parents worked very hard. At one point they both took part-time teaching positions so that one parent would be home every day after preschool with Jack. They attended classes and workshops, read books on being adoptive parents and Nancy met with me every Wednesday night for many months. We brainstormed ideas on how to discipline the boys. Working together, we developed a plan to focus on all of the positive actions that Jack and Jim were a part of each day. Nancy and Bob would just calmly reprimand the boys when they misbehaved, and they would both make a conscious effort to give them many encouraging affirmations every day. Gradually, the boys realized that they would get attention when they did something good, and they also began to feel better about themselves, which led to better behavior.

Nancy and I discussed her self-care regime, and she started to take time alone at night to read, set up professional

massages at home, and even bought theater tickets. When we spoke about her support system, Nancy realized the need for help. She spoke with her mother, who agreed to come over and watch the boys in the afternoon. This freed-up some of Nancy's time to concentrate on her work, it gave her a break from her parenting responsibilities and the boys forged a beautiful bond with their grandmother. This was a win-win situation all around.

We also concentrated on the boys' strengths. For example, Nancy verbalized that Jack was empathetic, a hard worker and seemed to be very spiritual. Jim was sensitive, also a hard worker, caring and very protective of his brother. By focusing on their strengths, Nancy was able to see the boys "in a whole new way."

During this time I was careful to point out all of the small steps that were taking place: Jim getting a good report from his teacher, Jack sitting through circle time, and the family having a calm dinner together. Little step by little step, life at Nancy and Bob's home began to change for the better.

At the time that Nancy and I finished our coaching sessions, the boys were doing well in school, other children were no longer afraid of Jack, the boys were able to express more of their emotions and home life was much calmer. There continued to be tough moments, but Nancy had the tools to help her work things out. The household was humming along smoothly, the boys had lots of friends and Nancy and Bob had worked together to help make a change for the better.

What makes this a really spectacular story is that this summer, three years after the coaching, I had Nancy, Bob, Jack and Jim over to my house for lunch and what a treat it



was. The boys are doing wonderfully. They are very polite, affectionate, and happy; they seem to be developmentally right on target. Both are doing great in school. Nancy and Bob looked relaxed and content. I was thrilled to see that the success of our collaborative efforts had survived the test of time. As a parent coach you can't ask for much more than that!

Peggy Gomula  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
San Diego, CA





# **Section Three**

## **Understanding “the Environment Teaches” Empowers Parents**

*The stories in this section give potent examples of John Dewey’s thoughtful remark, “The environment teaches.” What surrounds the child, whether the family home, the classroom setting, the neighborhood, or the commercialized media culture, profoundly impacts children’s attitudes, behaviors, and values.*

*PCI Certified Parent Coaches® often refer to the “growth sphere” to help parents understand that all that is “out there” enters the child’s personal zone and impacts his/her growth in either positive or negative ways.*

*A home and community that lovingly provides for the child’s needs supports optimal development, despite any negative influences along the way.*



## ***Building a New Home and Supportive Community***

*Taking time to find the right support network and that exactly right house when moving to a new city is so important. Carissa's story shows how a PCI Certified Parent Coach® can guide a proactive search, helping parents stay focused on what they consider most important for the home and community their children will grow up in.*

As a PCI Certified Parent Coach® and a licensed social worker, I've worked with hundreds of parents. Their stories each have their own unique flavor. Throughout the course of my time I spend with my clients, the flavor of the relationship changes, becoming more complex, deeper... richer. My appreciation for the coaching profession has grown with each experience. The story I'm about to tell is not my most challenging case, nor is it my most successful or personal favorite. The story I'm about to tell is about a client who helped me discover that being a parent coach is something I'm passionate about. She also showed me how powerful parent coaching is. Coaching this mother was an affirming experience for both of us, and I was sold.

Karen was a mother of a nine-month-old boy when we started working together. She and her husband, Bill, had just moved from the east coast to Minnesota after he accepted a job offer in the area. She had been here for a few months but was still in the process of making new friends. (As any other Minnesota transplant would say, this is a mighty task.) Karen felt that being a new mother was an exciting stage in her life. However, the tasks of building social networks, navigating a new city and finding the neighborhood where they would establish their roots as a family began to feel like an overwhelming task. It was natural for us to focus on building the critical social networks at the outset of our coaching.

Before moving to Minnesota, Karen and Bill managed a sorority house on a college campus. The sorority sisters were very supportive of them while Karen was pregnant and while her husband finished his graduate degree. Once their son had arrived, the feeling of community in the sorority was helpful and reassuring for Karen while she and her husband took on the new roles of mother and father. This experience was a microcosm of the kind of community she intended to build in Minnesota; these feelings of gracious support and warm generosity were what she hoped to replicate.

Throughout our time together, Karen was energetic, open-minded and excited about having the support of a parent coach around these goals. She saw the time on the phone as precious time to reflect, renew and be invigorated. She made a commitment to herself as a woman, a wife, and as a mother to build a support network of relationships.

Karen had several strengths that helped her with these goals. During our initial coaching sessions, we were able

to identify eagerness and curiosity to explore her new surroundings. She actively researched local mothers' groups and surveyed local Web sites for parent and child activities and groups. Karen would report on the activities she engaged in that supported her goals of connecting with people, groups and organizations. Her energy in accomplishing these weekly tasks was surprising, in particular because she was doing these inquiries and meetings with her infant son in tow. Through our coaching conversations, we attributed her zest for making these inroads to her anticipation of "reporting" back to me on her progress. This also helped to add structure to her life as a stay-at-home mother.

It was amazing to see this remarkable woman in action. Within three months, Karen had found a church community which she attended weekly, joined a couple of playgroups, one of which she helped run and had befriended a retired couple who occasionally invited her family to dinner. They eventually offered to baby-sit on occasion, so that she and Bill could enjoy a night out.

It was during this time when we began to shift gears in our coaching focus. Karen had felt that she was at a point where she was able to sustain her new relationships. She had an established routine, and the home buying process began to take center stage. As part of her social exploration, she also kept in mind the neighborhoods, suburbs, city parks and playgrounds she visited as she and Bill planned where they wanted to buy their first home. Karen asked for my support as she began the process of buying the home her son would be growing up in.

Karen and her husband were entering the housing market at a peak time. This caused considerable stress and

worry. As a way to manage the stress, we grounded our conversations in the detailed visions of the kind of house she hoped she would be able to purchase. She enjoyed the activity of dreaming about their ideal home. She loved sharing this activity with her husband. A couple of the elements she envisioned in her ideal home were a fireplace and a mantel, with hydrangeas in the yard. These features were important to her because these were things that she was attached to in the homes they lived in out east. In fact, she loved the Cape Cod style home, which was partially characterized by white molding. In Minnesota, this style is hard to come by, particularly in the suburbs where they were focusing their search for their new home. Because this home style was not popular in the Midwest region, she was drawn to certain home features and landscaping that reminded her of more moderate temperatures.

Surprisingly, the search for the house proved more challenging than finding a supportive community. However, after months of searching and being out bid, her preparation met with opportunity, and the visions of her ideal home became a reality.

After moving into her new home, they worked on painting the walls and doing other chores to make it their own special place. It was late winter/early spring when the snow began to thaw. As springtime approached, Karen found time to put down her paintbrush and reconnect with me after living in her home for a few weeks. There was much joy in Karen's exhausted voice when she invited me to visit her new home.

The home accommodated a growing family, and it had a large yard as well. When I arrived, we noticed that the melting snow had revealed hydrangeas near the entrance



of the front door. And as I entered I saw two fireplaces, exactly what she wanted!

Karen's new home became a physical manifestation of the framework she needed to house a life that continued to support her role as a nurturing mother, loving wife and a woman supported by her faith and connection with friends and family. In the period of time we worked together, she had fully transitioned into the life she imagined. Her new house became a warm, welcoming place for her family. Her new friendships and church congregation fulfilled and supported them. Karen had established the home and community environment. And I had established a complete trust in this coaching process as a powerful way to catalyze parents' dreams.

Carissa Morris  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
St. Paul, MN



## ***A Safe and Nurturing Environment—for Both Mother and Daughters***

*Stacey's story, like "Building a New Home and Supportive Community," punctuates the importance of a supportive, stable environment for families to be able to find hope and positive solutions to significant challenges.*

Eight degrees N and thirty-eight degrees E may immediately conjure up an image in the mind of those who did well in geography, but as for me, a visual learner, I need my atlas to help me understand where countries, towns and cities are in proximity to one another. Of course eight degrees N and thirty-eight degrees E are longitude and latitude coordinates. If you look on a map you'll find these coordinates show us where Ethiopia is located. Up until January of this year, I knew little about Ethiopia other than the limited information I had from television and the few books I had read about the country and its people. I never imagined that my path would cross with a woman from Ethiopia, an amazingly strong person who would deeply touch me. What started out as a favor to a local

elementary school principal blossomed into a life changing experience.

Meeting and coaching Frewoini was not only very rewarding, but also challenging in many ways. The goal initially was to assess what her basic needs were in terms of furniture, food, school supplies, medical, dental and education. Frewoini's immediate need was a job. She and I were up against the Department of Social and Health Services clock, and she was in jeopardy of losing her housing if she wasn't able to find work by a certain time. During our initial conversation, I immediately sensed a desire within Frewoini to build a more stable home environment for her daughters Meserat, Selam and Martha. Because of all the basic needs that needed to be provided, the girls' lives were a bit topsy-turvey. Thankfully, they were doing well in school, academically and socially. This was a big relief to Frewoini.

By the end of that first coaching session, I could tell I had a lot to learn from this young, determined and strong woman. I sensed there was a rich story yet to be heard about her life for the last thirty-three years.

Over time, I came to learn that Frewoini's life has been filled with pain and trauma. She has experienced the death of a parent, spousal abuse, suicide attempts, health challenges and racial slurs. She struggles both culturally and financially and copes with life as someone who has gone to school only until she was thirteen-years-old. She has no family here. Most of her relatives died due to war, famine or disease. Frewoini's mother did the best she could to raise two children alone, but thirty-three years ago, in a culture that offered very few opportunities to women, she made it on selling food in the local village. By the time Frewoini was thirteen-years-old, her mother felt that she would have a

better chance in life if she could find a husband for her. So, at fourteen, she was married to a thirty-five-year-old man with a three-year-old child from a previous marriage.

Within a year she was pregnant with her first child, delivering the baby before her sixteenth birthday. She had many difficulties with the delivery and almost died during childbirth due to her age and below-standard medical care. Several years later, her husband decided to move her and their two children to the United States. She spent hours preparing and trying to memorize everything she needed to remember to answer questions from the Immigration Officer that interviewed her. Eventually she left her home, her brother, her mother and the only world she ever knew to come to the United States.

In her new home, Frewoini soon discovered that she was going to have to find employment. With a sixth grade education and no reading or writing skills, her options were limited. Her marriage began to deteriorate, and her very controlling husband became more verbally and emotionally abusive. She confided in me saying, “My husband left bruises on me where people couldn’t see—on my heart and on my soul.”

As a young Ethiopian woman dependent on her husband for everything, she didn’t see any way out. She became so desperate at one time that she attempted suicide. It took her fifteen years to gather the strength to leave her husband. When I asked her what gave her the strength to stand up for herself she said, “Looking in my daughters eyes and seeing them lose their heart and hopes to a man like this.”

Learning all of this gradually during our coaching sessions, my heart went out to this remarkable woman. She had endured much suffering, but now that she had chosen

a healing path by seeking help, I could offer her hope, practical tools and resources. I treaded very gently and gradually, especially in the beginning of our relationship. Sometime during our second coaching session, I remember watching the tears roll down her face as I asked her to dream about her ideal job, something that would not only offer an income but something that would feed her soul. She cried because she said no one had ever asked her what she dreamed about. I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes when she responded, “Help people in assisted living care.” It touched me deeply when she said this; even though in need herself, Frewoini was determined to help others.

I had to give some careful thought as to what Frewoini needed most. She and her daughters needed so much: a car, medical and dental care, spiritual and legal support. In the end I realized it was stability that was most needed in order for their family to grow and thrive. From a stable home, Frewoini would also be better able to make decisions for herself and her daughters.

So I focused on a more ordered environment and helped Frewoini focus on that, also. In my training with the Parent Coaching Institute, I learned that “What you focus on grows.” I wanted Frewoini to see that she could begin to be consistent with her daughters and set up routines, like helping them with their homework and giving them a nightly ritual before bedtime. Once a few of these predictable patterns were in place, Frewoini experienced a home environment where she could relax a bit more and not worry so much. She found herself talking more to her daughters and even playing with them in spontaneous moments that brought delight and laughter to everyone.

The coaching relationship Frewoini and I were able to co-create formed the basis of the stability she needed. For the first time, she had someone in her life who was a constant reminder of her strengths and who treated her with the worth and dignity she so deserved. Together we created family stability by building a safe, trusting environment for her girls. In time Frewoini became clearer and focused on looking for her ideal job as a result of her now more peaceful home.

When supporting Frewoini on her job hunt, I introduced her to resources that helped her move out of survival mode and into self-sufficiency mode. This new life for Frewoini and her daughters began with the loving support of a welcoming community and the nurturance of a joyful, more stable home environment.

Stacey Witte  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Issaquah, WA



## ***Active Participation Creates a Positive Connection and Caring Climate***

*By naturally engaging in and enjoying being with our children, parents set the tone of a caring climate. Our children want to do more with us in a home environment that's alive with energy and connection. Amy's touching story beautifully demonstrates the magic in parental intentional participation with our children. Often the TV goes off—naturally!*

The folks at Children's Services didn't tell me much about Nadine before I met her. I didn't find out for three months that my client typically didn't show any willingness to work with social workers, was considered a "lost cause" and that my involvement was a "last ditch effort." When I first met her in her local community center, she appeared eager and attentive and even had a playful nature. We quickly entered into friendly, casual conversation and even joked with each other as we got to know one another.

Nadine attended a six-week parenting class that I was teaching and came early to each class. She seemed to

appreciate having ten others in the class as an audience to listen to her talk about her four-and-a-half-year-old son, Charlie. Right away it was apparent that Nadine admired her son and thought he was intelligent and very funny.

I began coaching Nadine after the first class. Nadine had appeared to enjoy the parenting class, but she approached the coaching with a look of skepticism on her face. As we sat outdoors on the porch of a lovely historic building, she seemed pleasantly surprised when I talked with her as a partner in caring for her son, rather than as a critic. I guessed that she was experienced at meeting with service providers and strategically fending off comments that suggested she was a less-than-adequate mother. I asked her to tell me about her son and intentionally showed authentic curiosity and encouraging support as I let her know that I understood she knows more about parenting him than anyone.

Nadine shared with me that she wanted to learn to spend more time with her son. At the time of our meetings, she had not spent an entire day with him; rather, she asked friends to babysit him at least part of every day. When she and I first met, she did not have a vision of herself interacting with Charlie. She liked observing him and was entertained by his conversations with others, but she was tentative in developing a personal relationship with him. She didn't have ideas of what to do to interact with Charlie. When they were in the house together, the only activities were eating, watching television and going to bed.

As Nadine and I talked, I asked her to share specific details of how Charlie spends his time—for example, getting dressed, eating and playing. Nadine would often look at me as if she expected me to interrupt her and instruct



her on how to interact and relate with her son. Rather, I commented to Nadine that she could trust herself and relax into her own ideas of what was fun and productive for both of them. I pointed out to Nadine that it sounded to me like Charlie was responsive to her, enjoyed her company, liked her to talk with him about his likes and dislikes and liked her to ask him questions and play with him. As she shared stories, I pointed out to Nadine that she interacted with him more than she knew. She appeared eager to discover all the things she was already doing that were caring and engaging for Charlie. Rather than instruct Nadine to turn off the television and encourage Charlie in more creative play, I pointed out the moments when she was playful with him. She had reported to me that she liked to tickle him because she liked to see him smile and hear him laugh, so I often referred to this positive response when she engaged with him in other ways, such as talking in the car or tucking him in to bed.

It seemed to me that Nadine initially saw her role as a mother as giving instructions such as putting toys away, and she seemed delighted to learn it was appropriate for her to relax and play with Charlie in everyday interactions as well. Her identity seemed to shift as she shared stories of the seemingly insignificant moments, such as making the sound of a truck while Charlie pretended to push a truck around. I gave Nadine encouraging feedback about the significance of such interactions, and Nadine seemed to realize that her presence could be both inspiring and affirming to Charlie. As I reflected back to her what she reported as Charlie's positive reactions to her, she came to realize that Charlie's behavior was uplifted by her interactions with him. She was not a passive observer, but rather she played a very

active role in creating the environment in which Charlie's thoughts, feelings and actions were formed.

Still beaming with pride as she spoke of Charlie's intelligence or clever sense of humor, Nadine began reporting stories of activities she and her son did together with very little prompting from me. Towards the end of our coaching, Charlie had a birthday, and Nadine not only planned a party for him at Chuck E. Cheese but, unlike previous years, she attended and stayed the entire three hours. Nadine invited many special people in Charlie's life, primarily the many caregivers that spend time with Charlie. However, Nadine acted like the primary caregiver that day. She lovingly provided for Charlie, bringing him home with her when the party ended. Charlie told her that he liked his presents but that he liked the cake she picked out for him best of all. He even asked if they could keep the leftovers for breakfast the next morning. Nadine smiled as she reported to me that it was a very happy birthday for both son and mom!

Amy Armstrong  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Columbus, OH



## ***A New Two-Year-Old When the TV's Off***

*Television impacts the family environment. Kathy's story shows that when parents take charge of their own and their children's viewing habits, dramatic positive changes result!*

One of my first parent coaching clients was a young mother of a stubbornly defiant two-year-old. Laura called me, desperate to have some help coping with the behaviors of her son, Derek, especially since another baby was due in a few short months.

During our first session, I learned that Laura worked full-time while her son attended in-home daycare. After daycare, he always seemed angry and demanding. He had tantrums and did not yet express himself with language. Laura was also often embarrassed by Derek's behavior. When she took him with her to visit friends, he did not play well with the other children. Even though she had a good husband, Laura was tired-out from the constant demands Derek put on her.

In one of our early coaching conversations, I learned that the TV was always on when Laura and her husband

were at home. After a hard day, it was an easy way for this working couple to get some space to themselves. Often Laura would find herself telling her son to wait until a show was over before she would attend to him, but tantrums would follow if she wasn't quick enough.

Laura was tired, frustrated and at her wit's end. Her dream was to have a more peaceful home, less stress and more time outdoors with her family. But she lacked the energy and motivation to make moves in those directions.

After one of our coaching sessions, Laura agreed to talk to her husband about what I shared with her. The information I gave her impacted her deeply. She eagerly wanted to explain the effects of TV on young children's development to her husband, although she wasn't quite sure how he would respond. This coaching took place on a Thursday. Laura was looking forward to the weekend to try out some of her new plans.

On Monday I received this email:

"Thanks so much for our chat last week. I wanted to share with you how immediately effective turning off the TV was for our son. I think what was most effective was how we interacted with him instead of 'zoning' on the TV. My husband wasn't too excited about the idea, but thankfully, the result was immediate. Our son wasn't hitting, he got over his fits much quicker, and I don't know about my husband, but I didn't feel like a guilty parent at the end of the day.

It was also interesting that our son chose this past weekend to take off with his words. I don't know if no TV had anything to do with it, but he's become quite the little parrot. Unfortunately,

when the TV turned back on for football on Sunday (baby steps) it was a bad day for games, and our son learned the “f” word. We didn’t realize how much he was listening.”

It is amazing how quickly a little coaching can begin to help a family. With accurate information about the impact of media and with determination to connect with their son, this couple made significant strides. Sure, I had to express some truths to Laura she didn’t know—information about TV’s impact on early brain development, for instance. But Laura was open and willing to absorb and apply this new information, changing some of her own viewing patterns in the process. She understood that TV was interfering with precious connection time between them, and she did something about it.

This was an extremely rewarding experience for me as well. I believe in the power of coaching to support those tough choices parents sometimes need to make in the best interests of their children.

Kathy Luiten Goodwin  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Wilsonville, OR



## ***Dinner without the People in the Box***

*As in “A New Two-Year-Old When the TV’s Off,” Chris shows, too, that the family environment changes for the positive when TV is monitored—especially during meal times.*

Sam and Dorothy were stressed out and were questioning the effectiveness of their parenting. We all have experienced that feeling at some point in our life with children.

One day, while they were discussing what the family’s agenda looked like, the topic of dinner hour came up. Dorothy expressed unhappiness that the television was on during dinnertime. In addition to the soccer practices interrupting their nights, it was getting too much for her to cope with. As their parent coach, I saw Dorothy’s new awareness as a great opportunity for these thoughtful parents to discover how they would like their evenings to go.

They left that coaching session with hope and encouragement when they realized that they had choices in their schedules. They were so excited, in fact they were beaming, when they returned the next week. “Tuesday night

is now game night at our house,” they informed me. They had come to the conclusion that they wanted to have more fun and that their personal relationships did not include the square box with people in it (aka, the TV).

Despite what some advertisers may lead us to believe, the people in the box will never love children like mothers and fathers do. The beauty in Sam and Dorothy’s new decision was that the kids responded to it with open arms; in fact, they now look forward to “game night.” Grandma, living nearby, is now involved in the special night. The children are active participants in the planning of the games and have embraced the time spent with their family. Television is off during meal times. The family even came up with a creative solution for those soccer practice nights. Now they have picnic style dinners at the soccer field, which makes the time together special.

When given the opportunity to pause and ask themselves what values they would like to integrate into their family’s lifestyle, these parents chose spending time with their family and orchestrating their own lives. They were able to regain control of their family’s future through fun and activities that the whole family can lovingly share.

Christine Ogle Erotas  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Pendleton, IN



## ***A Healthy “Growth Sphere” for Both Parent and Son***

*PCI Certified Parent Coaches® learn about the “growth sphere,” i.e., all that surrounds a parent or a child influences his or her growth, positively or negatively. Moms and dads monitor what goes into the child’s growth sphere, limiting negative influences as much as possible and bringing in positive influences as much as possible. Marie’s story poignantly shows that even after our children have grown, we support their healthy growth sphere by remembering to take good care of our own!*

Initially, Jessica contacted me via email. This single mom was very worried about her son and questioned her ability to parent. She was angry, lonely, controlling and distressed. Although she seemed lacking in self-confidence, self-esteem and self-care, she was clearly a functioning individual who needed to be empowered.

In that initial email she wrote:

“I’ve seen many counselors and read many books on how to parent my son who was diagnosed with



ADHD at age seven. I used to hear complaints from his teachers, coaches, neighbors, other parents or kids. To make the story short, now he is eighteen, and last year he stopped going to school. He is my only child. His dad died when he was twenty months old.

My son's story is long and sad. I'm not sure that I was a good mother to him. We make each other nervous and mad. I don't like any of his friends. And I do not approve of the way he lives and behaves. I love him very much, but most of the time I don't know what to do or how to handle the situation. I'm so sad that he wastes his time and youth by doing nothing except hang out with a bunch of losers. Throughout the years, I lost my confidence and self-esteem. I know my son is old to be considered a child, but to me he is still a child and a lost one."

I felt very sorry for Jessica and was apprehensive about coaching her. Her situation was unusual because her son was already eighteen, and she was asking for "parenting help." In reality though, it's never too late for a parent to ask for help. Our children, no matter how old, are always our children.

My main hesitation, however, stemmed from the fact that I wasn't sure whether she needed therapy or coaching. After speaking with her on the phone, it was evident to me that coaching was appropriate. She was not depressed; she was not looking for me to solve her problems. I could tell that she was an extremely intelligent woman who wanted and needed something more. She desired guidance with present day parenting challenges and needed empowerment. She was

open, focused and willing to try a coaching relationship. My gut told me that coaching would be very beneficial for her.

Although it would have been easy to get caught up in the negativity of her situation, her story inspired me. During our first session, she told me her life story. She grew up in Iran and lived in Europe where she met her husband. They fled for asylum, interviewed with the U.S. Embassy and fled to America with only \$1,000! She then moved from northern California to L.A. where she was very happy and got married. A baby soon followed along with the death of her husband. Going back to school was the only option for sustaining her family. From that point forward, she did an outstanding job of supporting herself, her son and her mother. For Jessica, it was all in a day's work; to me, it was completely overwhelming! At the beginning of our coaching, she was unaware of her strength and resilience.

During those first getting-to-know-you coaching conversations, Jessica was very negative and talked incessantly about her son and his problems. My inner voice guided me and advised me to let her talk. She had few friends who understood her situation, so I felt that it was extremely important to let her talk, interjecting positive comments whenever possible. Not surprisingly, this was incredibly effective.

Our calls went from talking only about her son and his problems to her telling me what a great time she had with her friends and what she was planning to do next. Of course, she did give me updates about her son, but her whole focus had shifted. She noticed the shift as well and laughed when I told her if she had been in the room with me at that moment, she would be picking me up off the floor. I could not believe what progress she had made, from taking "baby steps" to

taking giant leaps. She began to realize that she could not change her son without first changing herself, and she was actually starting to do things to make that happen.

The power of the coaching relationship allowed Jessica to feel supported, and as a result, she was able to model the behavior she wanted from her son. As she began to realize that she could not change her son without first changing herself, wonderful things started to happen. As she brought nurturing into her own “growth sphere,” she was better able to support her son’s “growth sphere,” realizing that he could make good choices, too, about what he brought into his life. During our coaching sessions, Jessica was laughing more and less preoccupied with her son’s “problems”. She became excited, energized and hopeful as she experienced her son growing in his ability to bring more positive influences into his life.

Through our coaching, Jessica slowly began to see things from a different perspective that allowed her to experience challenges with more confidence and approach her son in loving and understanding ways. She told me, “I listen to myself and my son more often than I used to do. I stopped forcing my son to change. Now I know that if there will be any changes in his behavior and his life style, it will be the result of his willingness to change.” With that attitude, major shifts happened. Jessica is more relaxed and her son is well on his way to a healthy adulthood, thanks to parent coaching.

Marie Muller-Noonan  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Montvale, NJ



## ***A Space for Waiting and Listening***

*Sometimes it becomes important for coaches to give parents space for making decisions. This type of non-interfering environment allows moms and dads to move at their own pace and to feel free to take the next step when they are ready. Lauren's story shows that even though many positive changes took place initially during the coaching, a time-out was needed for the core shifts to take place.*

As a new parent coach, I had a great deal of anxiety around the question of whether or not I could and would be successful as a parent coach. Yes, I understood the principles, the process and the practice of the PCI Coaching Model. I believed wholeheartedly in the power of these principles and the positive impact they could have in people's lives. I had hours of practice with family and friends. I had even applied the principles to my own life. Still, I wondered if it would work with a total stranger. My first coaching client convinced me that what I believed about this process is indeed true. And yes, I can be successful as a parent coach.

My first contact with Julia suggested that she, too, felt she would benefit from coaching. She was enthusiastic about moving forward, and as a new coach, this felt like progress from the start. Julia was outgoing, easy to talk with, and I even found that we had quite a bit in common. This was helpful in building the foundation for our coaching relationship. There was trust and a willingness to share from the first session.

Julia came to me with the “typical” parenting problems. Basically, like many of us feel at one time or another, she felt like she had no control of her children. She was frustrated by their disrespect and her inability to run the household the way she envisioned. She also shared in our first conversation that her family had moved to a new city just a couple of years before. They left family and friends and familiarity so that she and her husband could go into business with her father. She shared a bit about her relationship with her father, and immediately I recognized the toxicity of this relationship and the tremendous effect it was having on her life. I could see it. She could not. Would I be able to guide her to that awareness?

Julia and I talked almost weekly for about five months. Together we watched some elements of her dream come into practice. She learned to do more for her “self.” She had her family help her set up an exercise bike in the garage that she was spending time on every day. Having realized how much cooking and baking calms her, she began to use it as a fun diversion to a stressful moment or day. Eventually, she even found quality time with her husband again.

Through our conversations, I realized that she had no real evening routine. Plus, the children were watching quite a bit of television before bedtime. We discussed the

importance of routine and consistency with the children. We also discussed the effects that prolonged exposure to television and other screen implements can have on children. From these discussions, Julia realized she needed to work on this part of her day, and she did! She established bedtimes and a limit to screen time for each of her children.

She and her husband were enjoying more quality time with each other. And yet, there was always uneasiness about work. In fact, she still struggled and found many areas of her new life in this new city were not quite falling into place. She missed time spent with friends and with her schedule was finding it difficult to build new relationships. She saw this struggle in her children, as well.

So, though certain things were happening for her that felt good, the underlying issue was clearly making it difficult for her to truly achieve her dream. She was working hard and going through the motions, but she was struggling to appreciate the work she was doing. I asked questions in an effort to move her toward that “ah-ha moment,” and I could sense her courage and wisdom coming forward. I reminded her of her strengths and the great strides she was making. I waited. I listened.

At one point in the process, we missed a call or two when life got in the way. So I waited longer.

Little did I know that Julia was making a huge shift during this brief hiatus. I received an email from Julia apologizing for the missed conversations and requesting another week off to spend time with her family. Julia had finally had her “ah-ha moment.”

A great lesson I learned from working with Julia is that given the tools and the resources, my clients will find the answers they seek in their time, not mine. It is my job to

allow the space and the time for parents to reach their own insights and to trust that it will happen. Julia believes it was our relationship and the space I gave her during the coaching process that enabled her to come to an awareness she could not have reached alone, moving her to make real, lasting change in her life.

Lauren Leiker  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Lynwood, WA







## **Section Four**

### ***The Wisdom of Appreciative Inquiry to Achieve Dreams***

*Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed in the mid-80s, by business consultant and professor at Case Western University, Dr. David Cooperrider and his colleagues.*

*“Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives ‘life’ to a living system... In AI, the arduous task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, and design.”*

*The PCI Coaching Model adapts Appreciative Inquiry for parent coaching conversations.*

*AI’s principles are in alignment with Living System principles and work beautifully together to support a powerful change process.*



## ***Mission: Mom Possible***

*Kari walks us through the 4 D's of Appreciative Inquiry: Discovery, Dream, Destiny and Design, to show how coaching during each of the phases supported a tired-out, single mom find the miracle she was looking for.*

Meet Sophie, a single mom raising two children under the age of two, struggling through a recent divorce and looking for a miracle to help her with her family life. Like Sophie, so many moms find single motherhood to be nearly impossible. Finding time for basic needs, such as sleep, cooking, work and housekeeping is daunting with two small children. Addison, a mischievous two-year-old, and Ashley, an active twelve-month-old, are not unlike most children at those ages. Their goal is to simply explore the world around them and eventually gain a sense of independence. Typically, this is played out through repeated learning trials with the children and lots of exuberant “No’s” from parents.

“No, you can’t put your finger in the outlet.”

“No, you can’t push your sister.”

“No, you can’t grab the pan on the stove.”

“No, you can’t put Mr. Bear in the potty.”

And the “No’s” go on. Pretty soon, we become so specialized in our “No” language that we could earn a degree as “Dr. No.” Our children begin to tune us out, and we become the parents on the Peanuts cartoon, “Blah, blah – blah, blah, blah.” Good grief!

During our first coaching session, Sophie and I walked through the steps of Appreciative Inquiry together while her little ones were busy bringing out every single toy they had on the living room floor. Sophie was exhausted and could barely make it through our conversation since she had not slept through a full night in almost a year. I recalled when I had gone through something similar with my first born and shared my own experience as a new mom. I remembered one thing—it’s nearly impossible to do anything until you finally get some sleep. There seems to be an “early years fog” that creeps in, especially when sleep deprivation is involved. It’s quite difficult to function on all cylinders when you’re sleep deprived, so we put that action item on the “Urgent To Do List,” since it was going to be difficult to take any steps forward until she achieved this goal first.

## **Discovery**

In the Discovery stage, we created a list of strengths for Sophie and her children. It wasn’t a stretch to discover that her strengths in motherhood were putting her children first. She truly wanted the best for her children and let them have their way most of the time. In parent education, we call this style of parenting “Permissive Parenting.” Permissive parents believe that by being nice and allowing children to make decisions on their own, they are allowing children to become independent. While the intentions of permissive parents are focused in a positive direction, it is not in the

best interest of the child's healthy development. Research has shown that a child's brain is wired to learn by imparting limits, boundaries and discipline or "teaching." Sophie was simply too nice and too tired to parent to the best of her abilities, let alone keep up the never ending battle of the bulge of laundry, managing the endless toys in Toyland and coming to the rescue during the toddler wars.

## **Dream**

As we pressed forward with deep, thought-provoking questions, Sophie came up with an example of what seemed to work well as she described her ideal day. She recounted a day when everyone got enough sleep in the house, she improved organization and improved cooperation with the children. She was starting to see her way out. There was a faint light on at the end of the tunnel.

We began to explore deeper into her preferred future with questions that opened up her view of what she wanted her family to look like. I could see her eyes sparkle when she visualized getting enough sleep. She began telling me her dreams of how happy she would be if Addison and Ashley would sleep through the night so that she could have enough energy the next day to organize, clean and play with the kids. We even took her dream one step further to extend it to how she could incorporate self-care. Ideas were starting to flow freely now. She found some things that were sparking her imagination: baths, yoga, exercise, a tidy house. Most of all, she really liked the idea of feeling rested and having a more peaceful surrounding. That was it! Her goal was in sight. Like athletes who plan their strategy for the next big game, parents must also put their game face on and plan their winning strategy.

## **Design**

Stage three in Appreciative Inquiry is about taking action. We discussed strategies for the children to sleep through the night, from crying it out to family bed and what she thought may work well for her family. She came up with the idea that, perhaps if the children were on a regular schedule, they might go to bed at the same time every night and have more of a regular routine. Yes—Victory! The “ah-ha” moment arrived.

Now, the only question was how to accomplish this. I shared with her that what has worked for other parents is doing what is called “Backward Planning.” First, create a daily calendar with the hours of the day on the left hand column and the action items on the right hand column. Then, plug in the necessary obligations, such as work times, child care times and other regularly scheduled events. Next, look at what time the children need to be asleep in order to get in their required amount of healthy sleep. For example, toddlers between the ages of one and three-years-old require on average from ten to thirteen hours of sleep at night. Lastly, allocate the events that need to take place in order to get the children to sleep by that pre-determined time. For example, if the routine includes a bath, brushing teeth and bedtime stories, figure out how long it will take to do all of these activities and plot out the times.

Sophie and I discussed her strength, which was wanting to snuggle and cuddle with the kids, rather than holding to a specific bedtime. However, once she considered her goal of wanting more sleep, her desire to change her wavering habits became even clearer.

## **Destiny**

In the last stage, we recognized the changes Sophie made and celebrated her success. In as little as two weeks, she had started to increase her sleep and established morning and evening routines. The children were finally starting to sleep on their own without waking up in the middle of the night. Additionally, Sophie was starting to feel more energetic and was able to get more done around the house. Not only was she able to keep her house clean, but she was also able to get her little ones to help her with a regularly scheduled clean up time.

As a PCI Certified Parent Coach®, my task is to complete the circle of coaching with a celebration. Sophie wanted to celebrate by hosting a party. We had a get together with the kids, and I had the opportunity to see firsthand the changes in her family and in her household. The last time I spoke with Sophie, she had taken her life one step further and decided to add a self-care regimen. She began by joining the local gym and took a yoga class. Sophie did the impossible and made her own miracles come true. She has reclaimed her life as a single mom and is living her dream with more peace, self-confidence and lots of energy to spend quality time with her two adorable children.

Kari Pendray  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Arlington, WA



## ***Preparing to Take Flight***

*Lori's story shows that the 4 D coaching process of Appreciative Inquiry can work well for parents at any stage of the parenting journey, even for those approaching the empty nest.*

The empty nest—many parents dream about it, often joking with their friends and family about how they can't wait for the day that they'll gain their personal freedom back. But, along with the light-hearted jokes, comes a mix of emotions that often has parents torn between holding on and letting go as their children venture out into the world as adults.

Take Michelle, a forty-one-year-old project manager in the computer industry and mother of two. She and her husband Peter have been married for twenty years. Karen, their nineteen-year-old daughter, still lived at home while attending community college and working as a receptionist. Amanda, their eighteen-year-old daughter, was a senior in high school who aspired to attend college the fall after graduation. Both girls had done well in high school, having had pretty typical teenage experiences, yet Michelle was at her wits end not knowing who to turn to for help—her eldest daughter was dropping out of most of her freshman classes.



Michelle decided to consult me after running into numerous obstacles concerning her eldest daughter's lack of responsibility. Michelle described Karen as a bright girl; she received As and Bs in high school, was well liked by her peers and engaged in typical teenage activities. She modeled as a child and later became a high school cheerleader with aspirations of trying out with a pro team after she graduated. Michelle described some of her parental challenges, including setting and sticking to boundaries and reconciling her and her husband's value system with the values her girls were learning through the influence of popular culture. In particular, she was very concerned with Karen's belief that she was entitled to having it "all" without having to work for it. She said she idolized superstars, and therefore had unrealistic expectations about adult responsibilities. Although they met together each week to discuss Michelle's budget, the meetings weren't going well.

Michelle's frustration was extremely apparent, so I suggested we meet for a series of "appreciative" coaching sessions.

## **Discovery Phase**

During this first phase, I asked Michelle questions to help her discover what was working in her present situation. Although Karen had dropped-out of all her classes that quarter and the tuition Michelle had paid was non-refundable, she was confident in Karen's ability to apply herself if she set her mind to it. Karen had completed her first quarter and received good grades. She also felt positive about the way in which she and Peter raised the girls. She felt they had instilled positive values and taught the girls how to think for themselves and make informed decisions.

She felt like things would fall into place once they got through this rough patch.

### **Dream Phase**

In this phase, Michelle voiced concerns about Peter's lack of involvement in dealing with Karen's problems, particularly the financial issue. Michelle was clear that she wanted his help in supporting Michelle's budding financial independence. What this couple was experiencing seemed somewhat typical of what many couples go through when they approach having an empty nest. Their marriage was strained due to their daughters becoming independent, adding another level of complexity to Michelle's situation.

Michelle's vision for a preferred future involved planning a vacation with Peter and having him be more involved with the household finances and with the girls' independence. Her preferred future also included Michelle doing well in school, being financially responsible and more communicative with both her and Peter.

### **Design Phase**

As we met for more coaching sessions, Michelle felt positive about her ability to set and maintain mutually agreeable boundaries with Karen. She told me that weekly budget meetings were getting more productive. Michelle had begun asking Karen to be accountable for her expenses and established a plan for having her pay back the tuition that was forfeited due to her dropping her classes that previous quarter. She also decided to require Karen to pay for her future college tuition expenses, with the understanding that she could continue living at home as long as she was enrolled in school.

During this phase, all the action Karen was taking paid off; she was inspired and engaged in the process of setting boundaries and connecting deeply with her daughter. She and Peter were talking more often, too! At the moment when she realized her dreams were beginning to become a reality, Karen shared with me that she and Peter had booked tickets to Costa Rica. It would be their first of many trips there.

### **Destiny Phase**

After coaching Michelle for several months, I began to recognize the evidence that her dreams were becoming a reality. I helped her celebrate the positive changes that were taking place in her life, including the success of her weekly meetings with Karen. Karen was starting to live within a budget that she herself helped create. She was paying for her own college classes, which helped her become accountable to the commitment she made of going to college. She started making plans that included transferring to a four-year college and eventually calculated her graduation date and worked out a plan for which classes she'd need to complete to meet graduation requirements. She managed her busy schedule by enrolling in a couple of distance learning courses, so she was better able to balance school and work life. Michelle was looking forward to her and Peter's Costa Rican vacation, which was evidence that her life changes were bringing her dream closer to the present.

### **The Empty Nest Revisited**

Although Michelle continued having both daughters live at home, she felt much more prepared to deal with the emotional rollercoaster that accompanied being a soon-to-be empty nester. She began to live her preferred future,

which included improving her parenting skills by holding her daughters accountable for their actions and helping them better prepare for their path towards independence. With regard to her relationship with Peter, they began the rekindling process of working to regain the closeness they had prior to starting a family. The frustration in her voice that was visible at the beginning of our coaching journey has been replaced with a positive confidence that is evident of Michelle's path to fulfilling her goals and recognizing the amazing parent that she is.

Lori Goff  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Gig Harbor, WA



## ***The Discovery Phase: Initiating Success***

*In their training, PCI Certified Parent Coaches® learn to apply the Discovery Phase questions when coaching parents to create and maintain lasting, transformational change. Jennifer describes how crucial this first phase is to the success of the outcome.*

When I ask new clients to share with me what's already going well in their situation, instead of focusing our early conversations on their biggest concern or issue, it usually catches them off guard. After all, their focus tends to be centered on the pressing problem or concern that led them to reach out to me in the first place: the thing they're looking to me to "fix" through coaching. But time and again, I've seen that the real solutions, the ones that work, can be found in the things we collaboratively uncover during the Discovery Phase.

In short, when we focus our attention on what is already working within the family system, client-specific solutions begin to appear. In fact, I have found that there is a direct correlation between what (and how much) good we uncover

during the Discovery Phase and the lasting, positive changes that result from my coaching sessions with a client.

Admittedly, focusing on the good instead of on the problem is a new approach for most of my clients. Some may even presume that it's an approach I take because I don't *have* the answers they're looking for. However, right from the start, I ask them to trust the process alongside me, firmly believing that from the collective good that is shared, tremendous positive change will soon blossom. Granted, it takes patience—for both the coach and the client—to uncover as much good as possible early in the coaching relationship. Talking about what is already going well can be painstaking, especially for the client who wants to quickly move on to solving concern that brought them to coaching in the first place.

Taking time in the Discovery Phase has proven to be time well spent, as I have witnessed the seed for lasting, transformative change appear right there in the good that is uncovered early in the coaching process. To better explain this observation, I'd like to share a few examples I've experienced since I began my coaching practice in 2005.

## **Laura**

Laura contacted me shortly after finding out that she and her husband were expecting their second child. While they were genuinely excited, Laura was also apprehensive about the idea of having two children just eleven months apart.

As Laura began to share what she most appreciated about being a mom, she explained that both she and her husband, Clark, were thankful to have flexible work schedules and that Clark was a tremendous help at home.

In fact, as I continued to probe for Laura's strengths, she realized—out loud—that one of her biggest concerns was her own self-confidence as a mom. Since Clark was so helpful and their schedules were so accommodating, she rarely had a chance to nurture her own bond with baby, Jillian, apart from other members of the family.

Right there in the midst of discovering her strengths, Laura said, "But I can't just ask him to leave so that I can have some time with her." And in saying it out loud, part of the solution had appeared. In order for Laura to develop the "muscle" of her own self-confidence as a mom, she needed to ask for time alone with her baby.

It still amazes me when that happens—when the "solution" appears for the client, as they are in the midst of telling me a story about their situation. What I love about this, specifically, is that the answer so clearly comes from the client.

## **Cindy**

Cindy contacted me to discuss several issues she and her husband were having with their four-year-old, Nicholas. Over the course of several months, they had grown concerned that he just wasn't listening. In fact, on multiple occasions, Nicholas had even run away from them in the school parking lot.

After introducing the concept of Appreciative Inquiry, I asked Cindy and her husband to share with me some of Nicholas' strengths. They joyfully explained that he is an active, energetic boy who is very independent, loves books, is extremely predictable and craves repetition.

Later in our work together, when we went back to the issue of Nicholas' running in the parking lot, this couple's

own words came back to them. Nicholas' need for repetition was incorporated in designing a solution specific to the issues. We all realized that taking the time to repeat the directions, and having Nicholas say them back, is a simple concept. Yet, because he's already wired to appreciate repetition, it's a solution tailored to his personality.

## **Lainey**

Lainey is a single mom who contacted me for general support in raising her fourteen-year-old son, Jeremiah. After barely surviving the emotional torment of a long and drawn out custody battle, Lainey felt insecure about her parenting decisions and longed to know that her relationship with her son was authentic and grounded.

When I began to ask Lainey to tell me some stories about what was already going well for Nicholas and her, she expressed joy and relief that she had been given sole physical custody of her son. In fact, in the process of explaining some of the absurd accusations that had been thrown at her during the court proceedings, Lainey began to laugh. Hearing herself voice them out loud helped her to see that the accusations weren't just inaccurate, but that they could not possibly have be true of her as a parent. She jokingly said, "I should really write these down."

Later, as we began to design some strategies together, Lainey returned to this idea of writing down her experiences and began a journal that became for her the very voice of her confidence as a parent.

The Discovery Phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process has become my favorite part of parent coaching, because I know that the seeds of my clients' success are right there



in their own stories and musings. It's an immense privilege to participate in my clients' lives and witness them growing into the confident, grounded moms they were created to be.

Jennifer Wolf  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Grandville, MI



## ***From Problem to Solution—Without Problem Solving***

*Karen's story vividly illustrates how the phases in the Appreciative Inquiry process work together to bring strengths and energy to a difficult situation, moving a parent out of despair and into creative solution finding. The problem is solved through a seemingly miraculous process of transformation.*

The day began as many had that summer, with a hair-raising, ear-splitting tantrum. My youngest was screaming her displeasure at hearing the word “no,” and I was getting ready to have a tantrum of my own. Blessedly, my business phone rang and interrupted my impulse to scream or hide in the bathroom. As I answered it, I heard a small, tired voice on the other end say, “I’m hoping you can help me.” Exhausted myself, I thought, “*I hope I can, too. I am not exactly a model parent today.*”

So began our coaching journey together. After Christina briefly shared her story with me, and we set up a time to do a complimentary session, I was already eager to work with this mother. I could see that she was so tired and felt so guilty

about not knowing what to do with her strong-willed little boy. Everyday was a battle to get him dressed, to school, to keep his hands to himself and to not throw his food at the dinner table. She was tired of yelling and embarrassed to be doing so. I knew she deserved to feel better and deserved to know all the good she was doing as a mom but couldn't yet see. Before she hung up she confided, "I don't know if this coaching will work. I've tried everything..." I calmly yet excitedly told her that *together* we would make it happen.

Just as I begin with every client, Christina and I started looking at all the positives in her situation. Rather than jump in and tell her how to "take charge" and "nip those tantrums in the bud," we worked to build a solid foundation of trust and positive energy. We also focused on her strengths, strengths of her family, what she appreciated and what currently was working well. Beginning with the strengths was not an easy thing. But the way to feel hopeful is not to focus on the problem. Rather, it's to appreciate all the good, even in what looks like a hopeless situation; there is always something to appreciate, however small.

We did exactly that. We talked about what a strong marriage she had and how much she loved her husband. She told me about times when she was at her best before kids, as a college student, and later, as a mother. At times she would ask, "We *are* going to talk about the tantrums and aggression my child is showing, right?" I assured her we would. In fact, I kept a running list of all the good I was hearing and of her established and emerging strengths. Soon, the energy in her voice grew. On her own, she became willing to share tiny pieces of joy and appreciation in her life: how her child had given her a hug after school, instead of being cranky; how she realized that her child's temperament made transitions

difficult for him and that it wasn't about her being a bad mother; how much knitting was helping her to relax and stay connected to herself.

After building a solid cushion of hope and increased energy, our next task was to help Christina envision what she wanted her relationship with her child to look like. At first, she joked, "I want it to look like anything other than what it is! *Anything* would be better than the yelling and screaming going on..." In my work with moms of strong-willed children, this was an admission I had heard a lot over the years, and I shared with Christina that she wasn't alone!

However, I knew we needed to get very clear on specifics. We decided together to have some fun with this (fun always helps when it comes to trying new things!). We pretended that a fairy godmother had come and had granted her the biggest wish of her heart's desire, and all she had to do was start talking to me as if it had already happened. Giggling, she jumped right in and, speaking in the present tense, detailed exactly what was different and how great she felt. I thought she might feel foolish with all the imagining we were doing, but then I remembered how playful, imaginative and creative she was with her children, and I knew we'd be fine.

"*Just think,*" I mused to myself, "*If I had led with 'fixing' the tantrums, we would be missing all this rich detail about the new future she is creating.*" I was so glad we had stayed true to the PCI Parent Coaching Model and had used Appreciative Inquiry to focus on what already was positive *and* what the possibilities could be. So often, when the moms I coach are tired and feel down about parenting, it's because they often can't see a new way of acting and being. When we start imagining the possibilities together, I can feel the energy

shift into higher gear; moms get excited knowing that they don't have to be stuck where they are!

By the time we started to create small action steps toward creating her newly imagined future, Christina was already starting to say things like, "This past week, I did a really great job of taking a breath and calming myself instead of yelling. Then I shared with my child how he could do that when he was upset, too." She also shared, "Before, I was just fixated on getting the problem to go away—you know, to "get" my child to behave so I could feel better. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But now, I see how I would've been doing that from such a negative place. Even if the tantrum-taming techniques had been perfect, I was so out of balance and stressed that I doubt they'd have worked for me. I'm in a much better place now."

From this positive place, we worked together to come up with developmentally-appropriate strategies for all kinds of scenarios: getting off the school bus, managing her child's tantrums at the dinner table, helping her child channel his extra energy without hurting anybody or anything. Because we'd spent so much time up front focusing on what had worked in the past, what Christina was grateful for, and what would be the ideal future in her mind, the "answers" to her problems almost fell into place.

For example, Christina was a very sensitive, caring, feeling mom. As we focused on this strength, Christina realized why isolating her son in the bathroom in a time-out felt wrong to her; it went against the grain of who she was. In fact, there were lots of things that "clicked" and started to make sense about what hadn't worked before and what would work now. Together, we talked about a way to teach her son to meet his needs and handle his strong emotions

differently, in a way that was sustainable for Christina and her personality style.

Christina's internal changes partly involved becoming aware of and using her inherent strengths such as creativity, humor, patience and an intense desire to connect to her little boy. She also changed internally by being willing to *imagine what she wanted*, rather than focusing on getting rid of what she didn't. Tapping into that inner wellspring gave her the much-needed hope and energy to continue forward with all the changes she had begun in our coaching. She wasn't just energized because someone "gave" her parenting answers. Rather, her energy came from a sustainable process, completely tailored to her *because it came from her*.

This amazing mom went from feeling sad, hopeless and full of guilt to feeling empowered and hopeful because she knew all that she was doing to be a great mom. At the end of our time together she remarked, "I feel as though I've changed on the inside. I'm stronger."

Parent coaching was the spark that catalyzed Christina into a new, positive reality. Christina, herself, gets the credit for being willing to let the spark ignite her *and* for making the changes happen. In essence, she rediscovered all she was capable of because she got in touch with that wise part of herself that she had temporarily forgotten. Her strength, energy and commitment to her parenting are rooted inside this self, and she now knows how to tap into this part to live the life of her dreams.

Karen Bierdeman  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Olympia, WA



## ***Becoming an “Old Fashioned” Parent***

*Through the Appreciative Inquiry process, this mother was able to return to living what she valued—connecting deeply with her children and enjoying them—even during the busiest days.*

Tiffany is a stay-at-home mom with a six-year-old daughter and a four-year-old son. Though she had immediate family in the area and many resources at her fingertips, Tiffany felt uninspired and sometimes regretful about her role as a mother. She had quit her high-level accounting position when her daughter was born and was beginning to wonder if this was the right decision or not.

When Tiffany and I began working together, she really didn't know what kind of parent she wanted to be and what she wanted her family to look like. She truly loved her children, but playing with blocks and going to the park every day just seemed mundane; sometimes she just felt like a babysitter. Using Appreciative Inquiry, we began discovering what it was like when Tiffany was pregnant the first time.

- What did she daydream about?

- What was it going to be like when they would be a family of three?
- What kind of parent did she envision herself to be?
- What were the important values and beliefs that were to be passed down to her children?

After several coaching conversations and story-telling, an image began to emerge again. As Tiffany put it, an “old-fashioned” parent really resonated with what she wanted to be. She wanted to teach her kids, cook with them and discover nature with them instead of just riding bikes through it. She wanted to pass down the importance of giving to others and being thankful for what you have. She wanted her children to know the value of family and how she would always be there for her children whenever they needed her. Could she do all this with a four- and six-year-old?

Using Appreciative Inquiry techniques helped to bring depth and meaning to her stories, thoughts and memories. During the days between our coaching calls, Tiffany worked hard to bring clarity to her new emerging vision of what motherhood meant. Instead of reading a magazine on the floor next to her children playing, for instance, she began to play with them instead. Lessons would arise such as sharing and how to problem-solve. When a toy was broken because of being mishandled, she and the children would discuss actions and consequences and how to deal with those consequences.

Suddenly, Tiffany wasn't a babysitter anymore; she was a teacher, a guide and a mother. What used to be boring and mundane to her now became invaluable. Her job as a mother had a purpose and a direction, and she knew that her children needed her. She began to notice the look of



accomplishment on her son's face when he built his block tower. She loved her daughter's proud look when Tiffany asked her if she wanted to help make dinner. Mostly, Tiffany embraced her full heart at the end of each day as she thought back to what they had done together as a family.

By the end of our coaching series, Tiffany truly rejoiced in her role as a mother. She could now envision her children in the future and how the work today would continue to guide them in that positive direction. By going through each of the four phases in Appreciative Inquiry, Tiffany was able to discover what were her true values and beliefs, what was really important and what was currently working in her situation. She was able to create a detailed dream about what her preferred future and role as a parent was. A workable plan was then co-created with achievable steps towards her goals. Finally, Tiffany was able to see the evidence of her hard work.

"I love being a mom to my kids!" she said. "I know how important my role is, and I found fulfillment as a person in being a mother to my children. I never dreamed that this was all inside of me somewhere." By focusing on the positive and telling and re-telling the stories, Tiffany was able to become the parent of her dreams.

Alexandra Blumencranz  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Clearwater, FL



## ***Between Here and Where You Want to Be***

*PCI Certified Parent Coaches® use Appreciative Inquiry methods to help moms and dads achieve a clear image of what they really want. In this story, Denise guides a gentle, compassionate questioning process, helping her client travel a meaningful path “from where she was to where she hopes to be.”*

When Gianna first came to me about parent coaching, she wondered aloud, “How is it that something as natural as parenting should require a ‘coach’ to help with a problem?” It was a good question. The answer, I told her, would lie within the coaching process on which we were about to embark.

I could have answered the question outright, but sometimes experiencing the answer is much more fruitful than simply hearing it.

Gianna initially sought coaching because her six-year-old was demanding most of her attention, and the rest of her family was suffering for it. Kaylee was lying, calling Gianna names, talking back and in general, not the happy child she had been previously. Kaylee had been sliding

down this path for a few months. Gianna shared that they used to laugh and giggle together, share stories and play—they were very close. Her pain was apparent when she spoke of the hurt she felt for her daughter's sake. This was not how she envisioned her relationship with her daughter. Gianna was saddened by the loss of their close bond, but she was determined to change Kaylee's behavior and show her that she could be independent without being hurtful.

Gianna's transformation began slowly. We started by discussing what her family was like on a daily basis. As we discussed her family's strengths, some positive feelings began to emerge. She had overlooked how she and her husband had great talks after dinner. When she talked about Kaylee, she saw something new in her daughter, an independence blossoming, a willingness to learn and the frustration so often felt when little hands set about trying to do big things.

Over the course of a few weeks, Gianna began to open up and share more stories about her family. The more open she became, the more she began to look at her concerns with new eyes. She focused on the future and was able to envision what she wanted for her daughter. We clarified through our conversations what it would look like to have her family exactly the way she dreamed. *A path was beginning to form between where she was and where she hoped to be.*

Gianna began to work with her daughter on some ideas she had come up with during our conversations. She shared with me that it was difficult at first. Kaylee was still being mean to her, but Gianna had a new plan. Rather than shut down and be quiet (her previous

solution due to her low self-esteem), she reacted. She told her daughter that her behavior was unacceptable and that it hurt her feelings when she spoke to her this way. She offered different ways for Kaylee to express her frustration without being hurtful. By offering alternatives, the communication between them improved. Kaylee, even though only six, began to understand what her mother expected of her. Over a period of three months or so, it started to work. When Gianna was clear about her vision and what she expected from her daughter, Kaylee was willing to comply!

Now Gianna was ready to tackle another problem. Whenever she had helped her daughter with her homework, a terrible fight ensued. This was followed by an hour or two of misery until the homework was finished. I helped Gianna envision a different outcome. She wanted her daughter to experience less frustration when she was working. This frustration, we decided, is what led to the arguments and misery afterwards.

First, Gianna changed the routine. Instead of having Kaylee do homework immediately after school, she gave her a snack and allowed some playtime. She involved her daughter in the decision somewhat by asking when she felt the homework should be done. Of course, Kaylee gave the kid-answer, "Never!" and this had to be whittled down to a compromise of "after dinner," but the communication with her daughter was now a priority. Even if she didn't agree with her mother, Kaylee felt like her opinion mattered, a small shift with a huge impact.

Once they decided on a time, I suggested Gianna let her daughter work independently (she had hovered before), sharing with Kaylee her expectations for

homework and leaving it at that. These expectations were that the homework was completed neatly and she must be working and not playing, coloring, or wasting time, if she wanted to work alone. Gianna would only help her if she asked for help.

After a trial run of a few weeks, Gianna shared with me that she and Kaylee still had the occasional run-in, but that homework time had become a lot smoother. This was part of her dream when she began the coaching process. From a coach's standpoint, when this kind of success occurs, I feel like it is my own success as well. It's uplifting to see a client reach their goals after coming to coaching so very frustrated and anxious. It propels us forward and drives the dream to see what else we can accomplish!

Gianna's story is a reminder to me of what is so special about the parent coaching process. It is not a matter of solving a problem, for just about anyone can do that. It is a unique experience where collaboration brings out of the client deep, personal and sometimes raw emotion. The coach is not left untouched. I felt compassion, creativity and a deep affection for her and her family.

Toward the end of our coaching, Gianna told me that things she has wanted for her family and dreams she never thought were possible, including owning a stable, working part-time instead of full-time, quitting smoking and healing her marriage, were coming true. Her voice was now filled with energy and hope as she experienced these amazing changes in her life.

So I come back to the original question she asked me when we first met. "How is it that something as natural as parenting should require a 'coach' to help?" The answer

lies in the relationship we built and the collaborative efforts of two people working towards the same outcome. What was hidden from sight and mind before had emerged as solutions, ideas and dreams fulfilled.

Denise Nye  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Hawley, PA



## ***Positive Change Begins in Each Moment***

*At one time or another along the eighteen-year parenting journey, we all say something to our children that in hindsight we wish we hadn't. Peggy's story exemplifies the hope in knowing that in any moment we can begin a positive change process, by making a different decision or by adjusting our attitude—or both.*

“I really blew it!! I am so mad at myself! I can't believe I ruined it.” The anguish in her voice spoke volumes about how upset she felt today. When Emily first came to me for parent coaching, she spoke about many parenting challenges, but more than anything Emily wanted to really feel that she was a good mom. Top on her list was her promise to herself that she would not be a “yelling mom.”

It was now the fifth of our weekly phone coaching sessions, and Emily explained how yesterday she went grocery shopping with her two children, Kelly, four-years-old, and Diana, ten months. As a treat, she promised Kelly they would all go afterwards to the dollar store. The dollar store was Kelly's absolute favorite place to shop, and she

eagerly looked forward to enjoying the thrill of selecting the “perfect something.” While at the grocery check-out, Emily’s baby, Diana, started to fuss. By the time the last bag was placed in the trunk of their car, Diana was in an all-out meltdown; it was lunchtime and she was hungry. So, instead of going to the dollar store, they went to a local café for lunch. Diana ate a little and decorated the restaurant floor with her remaining food. Kelly kept asking “When are we going to the dollar store?”

Meanwhile, Diana started fussing for her nap. Emily wanted to keep her promise to Kelly and they went to the dollar store. Kelly was thrilled to shop with her own piggy bank money. What a store! So much to see and touch! Kelly enjoyed seeing and touching everything that caught her eye. Meanwhile, Diana was becoming fussier (and louder) by the minute, and Emily’s frustration passed her tolerance level. With her hot button pushed to the limit, Emily scolded “Kelly, what’s the matter with you? Why can’t you just find something? We need to get out of here now!” Emily sadly expressed to me, “I could hear the words burst out of my mouth, and I hated what I heard myself say.” Little Kelly quickly made a purchase, and Emily rushed to the car to buckle Kelly and Diana in their car seats for the ride home. On the way home, Kelly sadly said, “Mom, you really hurt my feelings.”

I could hear that Emily felt she failed miserably with the events of this shopping trip. She then said in an annoyed tone, “And I bet you are going to tell me there is something positive in all this, aren’t you?” But throughout our parent coaching sessions, Emily came to realize that we worked on solutions towards effective change from the positive rather than negative perspective. The power of Appreciative



Inquiry questions made an enormous impact at this point for Emily to look at this situation with a different lens.

Using an AI perspective, we discussed that although Kelly felt hurt by how her Mommy yelled at her in frustration, and it took away the pleasure of shopping with her coins at the dollar store, something she patiently waited to experience, Kelly felt safe communicating her disappointment and hurt feelings to her mom instead of holding them inside or acting out. Emily paused and relaxed in the evidence that her four-year-old daughter was able to express herself and communicate her feelings to her mom.

It's interesting how evidence of a healthy mother/daughter relationship showed up. By the end of our coaching, Emily expressed that she became more aware of how positive aspects can exist in situations one would tend to view as negative. Emily talked about how this shopping episode showed her the importance of thinking through what she wanted to accomplish (grocery shop), considering the reality of the time frame and leaving room for the "unexpected" (extra fussy baby) in her plans. She spoke about what led up to pushing her hot button; she only had a certain amount of time to "get it all done and be back home" and felt pressured for it all to work out as a win-win for herself and her children. Emily expressed how she felt guilty because Kelly got the short end of it.

The AI principle of Simultaneity says, "Change begins at the moment the question is posed." So I asked Emily if she identified anything positive or any learning opportunities from this experience. Emily said the positive included how Kelly expressed her feelings. Also, she learned to plan to do less when she has a limited time slot. Emily saw an

opportunity to model how important an apology was in a loving relationship.

That evening Emily spoke to Kelly at bedtime about the dollar store incident and apologized for hurting Kelly's feelings. A warm hug and kiss was enjoyed by both, an additional evidence indicator of the quality of their relationship! I tenderly affirmed Emily by telling her, "You **are** a good mom." And to my absolute delight, instead of Emily coming back with why she wasn't, she simply said, "Thank You!" Wow! Although I told her in past coaching sessions why she was a good mom, this was the first time she accepted the compliment. It was major shift of perspective for Emily to see herself as a good mom, a very important step in her parenting journey.

Peggy Fitzpatrick  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Mountain Lakes, NJ



## ***We Get What We Focus On***

*It's often a tremendous challenge to stay focused on the good when we are in the depths of a challenging situation. Through the Appreciative Inquiry process, parents delight in experiencing how their life changes with their coach's help to keep them focused on the positive.*

“How has your life improved since Beth joined your family?”

This was a question that I asked an overwhelmed mom, Paula, who adopted a three-year-old last year. Paula complained that her child is very strong-willed and described how distraught she is that they get caught in power struggles on a daily basis. She was quite stressed, and at first it was a chore for me to get a positive response. After Paula was able to name Beth's first positive quality, I pushed for her to think of more. After making a brief list of Beth's sweet attributes, this mom's mood quickly brightened. The energy expanded, and a dark and despairing conversation turned positive.

I understood that this mother waited for a child for so long that she had created a fantasy about being a mother that was not realistic. As Paula mourned the death of this

fantasy, Beth needed to feel welcomed, safe and nurtured in her new home.

We moved on to talk about letting Beth make some choices, such as what to wear in the morning, what to have for breakfast and other little things. I asked Paula to make an absolute list of things that could not be negotiated, such as safety issues but pointed out that some things are just not important or worth having a struggle over. We could not have arrived at this point if the conversation had not turned in a positive direction, which resulted from the question asked above: “How has your life improved since Beth joined your family?”

It was at this point that I really felt the power of parent coaching. This mother could have stayed in her loop of negativity with Beth forever. In fact, she really didn’t want to give up her ego-based notion of being right and needing absolute control. It took a little time, but Paula was able to slowly view this new family member as an innocent child instead of a wild thing to be tamed. Usually it is hard for parents to realize that their behavior contributes to or can be the root of problems with their children. The use of Appreciative Inquiry in the form of a positively framed question, allows a parent coach to redirect the parent’s negative focus instead of becoming critical of her behavior. Once parents start to see that small changes can yield big results, most figure out for themselves which of their own behaviors cause problems with their children.

Another question that has resulted in success is,

“What do you love about your daughter?”

Positively framed questions help to remind a parent that even though a child’s behavior can be annoying at times, this is only a tiny aspect of a child; it does not represent the

whole child. When we focus on negativity, we only see the flaws or the glass half-empty. When focusing on what works and what goodness and sweetness already exist, the flow of joy opens into our lives.

It has been said that people who live in places of great beauty can get so accustomed to the view that they fail to notice after a while. In the parent/child relationship, the same type of problem can arise; parents can forget that children are precious treasures as daily life and routines speed along faster with every passing year. This is where the magic of Appreciative Inquiry can sharpen the focus on the wonderful and sweet parts of parenting that make the journey, here and now, worthwhile.

Barbara Siergiewicz  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Rockport, MA



## ***Weaving Their Own Net***

*The poetic principle of Appreciative Inquiry enables a deeper connection to our dream or “preferred future.” Holding on to a unique, appropriate image helps parents keep their core intent in mind, as well. In this story, Sydney gives the gift of the image of a special net for stepmother and daughter to weave together.*

I first met Sharon at a gathering in our community. She was a visitor; we were exchanging small talk, and she asked about my life in a small town. My enthusiasm about my work as a parent coach was contagious, and soon after meeting her, I received an email requesting an appointment. Sharon came to our first session motivated and clear about what her goals were. She had recently married into a family with three teens, one who lived with Sharon and her husband. Sharon had never been in a parenting role before and was honest about the mix of emotions she was experiencing. Bright and resourceful, she was determined to create a nurturing, safe and easy home for her new family. This was particularly challenging because of the history of her new family.

Now seventeen, Sharon's stepdaughter, Tara, had been raised by her father because her birth mother had a drug and alcohol problem and was often unable to provide care or guidance to her daughter. While Sharon's husband was a loving and caring father, he was required to travel frequently, and his daughter was often cared for by her siblings or friends. Tara had little structure in her life and was not thrilled to have another adult in her home. Sharon's determination to build a home based on the family was in direct conflict with Tara's determination to maintain her freedom and influence over her father. The lines had been drawn.

Sharon was clear in her intent to "lighten up and change the way I see and execute my role in the family." She went on to explain that she would like to develop a feeling of ease in the home, share more connecting moments with Tara and feel more included in the family. The present home environment was full of tension and separateness, punctuated by moments of caring and connection.

Listening to Sharon, I was struck by her tendency to focus on the negative. However, I also sensed her willingness to explore shifting her focus and her determination to make a change. Sharon was also clear in her intent to remain open and honest regarding her personal responsibility and her role in the challenges the family was facing.

While acknowledging that Sharon had married into a challenging family dynamic, I asked her to start noticing what was working in her life. The first thing we did was to change the way she referred to herself from stepparent to bonus parent. From there we explored the details of select times when she and Tara were able to connect and the

relationship Sharon had with her husband. I also asked her to concentrate on her own strengths and the gifts she brought to the family when she married. Sharon was able to recognize that she had a lot to offer. Her willingness to show up, to love, to nurture, to provide and to share her personal life experiences were all positive additions to the family dynamics.

Next, I asked Sharon to talk about Tara's strengths. Following my request, there was a long, painful silence. After several minutes she said, "I know I should be able to come up with at least one, but I honestly can't." Acknowledging her pain and discussing the family dynamic a bit more, I gently reminded Sharon of her description of Tara as someone who was stubborn and who could get anything done that she set her mind to. We considered positive qualities that help people achieve their goals. Sharon was able to see that Tara could be focused, determined and perseverant under difficult circumstances. It was a start. Sharon's homework was to notice anything that Tara did that could be seen in a positive light. If she felt comfortable, she would comment on the quality or behavior that she appreciated.

Our second session was just one week later. The transformation was inspiring. By shifting her focus from what was not working to looking for what was working, Sharon had created a dramatic change within the household. Tara had begun to seek out Sharon's company, was spending more time at home and had asked to be involved in a family project. There were still challenges, and Sharon was clear that this was only the beginning, but now she felt hopeful that she and Tara could develop their own healthy relationship.



Within a month of beginning our work together, I found myself smiling as the first forty minutes of our session was spent with Sharon describing all the positive experiences she and Tara had shared over the past week. There were still considerable challenges, but Sharon had become adept at noticing any signs that Tara was reaching out or demonstrating trust in their relationship.

Sharon identified her greatest needs as wanting to feel she was contributing positively to the family and having a sense of belonging. The first was simple to validate. By paying attention to her strengths, we were able to create a list of gifts she brought to the family. The greatest of these was her ability to show up and be present no matter what. As the family experienced several dramatic events, Sharon was consistently the person who met each member of the family with open arms and unconditional love.

Finally, Sharon and I explored her role as a stepparent. Looking at the relationship a birth parent often has with a child, we used the image of a safety net that is always present to catch them no matter the challenge to the relationship. Sharon acknowledged that Tara and her father had the security of knowing that their relationship as parent and child would exist no matter what happened. In a relationship that is socially and legally referred to as “stepparent,” there is no safety in knowing that it will always exist. Sharon had been searching for her place in the family and at times felt shut out and adrift when Tara rejected her. Together we developed the image of Sharon and Tara weaving their own net, a net that would hold their relationship as unique and sacred no matter the challenge. Once again, Sharon’s commitment

to her new family was awe-inspiring as she renewed her determination to show up for Tara and the rest of the family.

Sharon's family has faced many serious and traumatic life events over the course of the last year. Through them all, Sharon has remained committed to her relationship with Tara. I recently received this email:

“As she (Tara) headed up the stairs to go to the gate, she kept turning to see if I was still there, waving and throwing a kiss or a smile in my direction. I walked off to the parking lot in the darkness and with a softness in my heart I hadn't quite sensed in that way before, and caused the tears of joy and gratitude, for all the hard work 'we've' done, showing the signs, that the seeds you helped plant with me are truly coming to fruition.”

Sydney Wiecking  
PCI Certified Parent Coach®  
Kamuela, HI



## ***Forced into Coaching: An Unusual Situation***

*Through an authentic appreciation of strengths and with a co-constructive approach, PCI Certified Parent Coaches® can spur intrinsic motivation for parents to be the best they can be. Patty's story offers a memorable example of the joy and energy a positive focus brings.*

The Parent Coaching Institute referred David, a divorced parent, to me. He had been ordered by the court to receive parent coaching in order to be allowed to spend more time with his son.

David was not exactly what you would expect when you get a new client for parent coaching. He was not coming to coaching out of his own initiative and was not very motivated to be coached. I felt that this could be a tough situation, since one of the core ideas of the PCI Parent Coaching Model is the willingness of the client. How would I be able to coach someone who is practically being forced to be coached?

The court report drew a picture of David as an overpowering, controlling person who always wanted and

needed to be right and who would turn facts around until it looked like he *was* right.

David wanted to be coached twice a week instead of the usual weekly sessions because he “wanted to get it over with quickly” in order for him to take the required report from me back to court. At this point I was wondering how much impact coaching could actually have on him and if it was not going to be a waste of time, since he showed no interest in the coaching process itself.

David very much needed to hear the authentic appreciation I gave him for being a good and dedicated father. He was initially reluctant to open up in our coaching sessions, and I could tell that he wanted to give me the picture of the perfect dad in order for me to present this to the court. The reason for this was that David had continuously been criticized for what he does with his son. He had lost his trust in everyone who was going to judge him. Once he found out that I wasn't there to judge him and tell him what he was not doing right, I started to see his energy going up, and he engaged in an increasingly meaningful coaching relationship with me. In the third coaching session he told me, “It is really nice to, for once, be told what I am doing right! And it feels good to hear that I am actually a good dad.”

That's when I started to feel the reciprocity of a co-constructive coaching process; he felt good, and in return I felt more energy to coach him because of the feedback he was giving me.

David was in part looking for the appreciative comments and the reassurance that he was doing a good job. The other part of our conversations usually had to do with his concern that his son needed to learn to develop more self-esteem,

self-confidence and to speak up for himself. I found that David, in his over corrective and somewhat dominant way, was not really helping his son with his self-esteem. He was correcting him too much. I tried to slowly steer him towards the idea of letting go a little more when he was with his son. I encouraged him to let his son experience activities they did together without David always correcting him and reminding him of doing better. We agreed that it is not a bad idea for children to learn from their own mistakes, as long as it is safe.

With time, I heard stories like: “We went bowling, and I just sat back and enjoyed watching him.” (David wasn’t giving him instructions.) Then his son turned around and said, “Dad, why aren’t you saying anything?” For his son, it was an unusual situation to not hear his dad telling him what he was doing wrong or how he could do it better. I considered little stories like this a success since I felt David was showing insight and tried actively to use strategies we had been talking about.

As our coaching progressed, he clearly started to look forward to the calls and was excited to share anything new that had happened in his life or in his relationship with his son. He was thankful for my appreciation in regards to his parenting skills. We developed a mutually satisfying relationship. I would never have thought this could happen when I started coaching him. His willingness to be coached had completely changed.

The PCI principle “Positive, amplifying feedback is key to effective change” was important in this client’s coaching. It was amazing to see David’s change as I gave him more and more positive feedback regarding his parenting. It seemed that he really needed to hear this and had not gotten any

positive feedback as a father over many years. He kept telling me that it feels so good to know that he, after all, is doing something right. Many people in his life had been trying to tell him that he was a bad father. It was clearly the positive feedback that helped David open up to the idea of getting coached and that made him trust me.

One coaching strategy that I noticed early on that was very important with David was affirmation of him doing things right and being a good parent. Due to the difficult divorce and the constant fighting over the son, he had suffered a lot of criticism as a father. As it goes with divorces, the involved parties will do and say anything about the other one in order to look better in court. These two parents were using any possible incident to prove that the other one was not a good parent for the son. When David noticed that I was paying him compliments for his thoughtfulness and actions regarding his son, I could almost see how this man was starting to sit up straighter and was becoming proud of what he was doing with and for his son. It felt to me like watering a plant whose soil had dried out and was in desperate need of water. Everyone is so thirsty for some appreciation. The good feeling that stays from positive comments can then catalyze more actions into the right direction. It sure did for David!

As we completed the twelve sessions mandated by the court, I was sure David would be happy he was done. How surprised I was when he asked to continue the coaching! I felt that we had really achieved something. After initially not having been very interested in getting coached, David changed his attitude after the first few sessions and started to actually enjoy talking with me. He became confident that he could open up towards me, asked me for my opinion and

turned new ideas right into action. This was a wonderful proof that appreciative coaching can transform people—even when initially lacking the motivation to be coached!

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## ***Re-Found Joy***

*Using Appreciative Inquiry, PCI Certified Parent Coaches® help moms and dads see with new, hopeful lenses, enabling them to regain happiness and satisfaction. Through modeling and evoking a vocabulary of hope, parents learn to apply a new focus for their children, too, as Lori's story beautifully illustrates.*

As I reflect on the wonderful experiences I have had working with parents, one of the most marvelous and rewarding comes to mind easily. During our initial contact, Mary was insistent that I work with her at her home on the east coast, in person. (I live in Minneapolis.) She felt strongly that I needed to observe her and her four-year-old son in order to effectively help her. Though my going out to the east coast remained an option I was willing to provide, I was able to persuade her to save the higher cost of my travel out there and give working with me a trial run first by the normal distance parent coaching means of weekly phone sessions together.

Mary is a single mother of a four-year-old son, Alex. Mary and Alex's father, Ben, are divorced. Ben is involved in Alex's life and is a good father, though Alex spends most



of his time with Mary; he spends occasional weekends with his dad. Mary came to me filled with despair and completely overwhelmed with trying to cope with Alex. Alex has special needs that cause his behavior to be anti-social when around other children and in public places. His actions create disturbance, embarrassment for Mary and the endless requirement of Mary to handle difficult situations in the face of many judgmental adults that do not understand the situation. These things in and of themselves would wear a parent down. In addition, Mary is struggling financially and is dealing with her own debilitating disease. All of this would more than explain the sense of hopelessness and despair that filled Mary at the onset of our work together. God bless her for finding the wherewithall to seek a parenting coach instead of throwing in the towel and giving up.

And so we began together, Mary and I. She enthusiastically and courageously embraced coaching, sharing her amazement and satisfaction with the effectiveness of our sessions that were taking place by phone instead of in person. In only a matter of a couple of weeks, she was grateful I had persuaded her not to spend the money to fly me out there, since this was working out so very well for her. That made my heart smile.

From the first session, Mary was seeking tremendous peace of mind and an ability to enjoy her child once again. She was in a survival mode to just get through each day, not feeling very good about herself as a mother, lacking confidence in her ability to handle things, feeling badly about how she was handling things and unsure of what to do about it. Ben was no help because he only has Alex for a day or two here or there and not 24/7 most of the time, like Mary.

As Appreciative Inquiry led us together, we captured Mary's love and appreciation for her beautiful son. We built from that in specific ways that helped her see her son through new lenses, being the loving and fabulous mother that she is. Even I could feel her thrill at her newfound sense of increasing joy during her days with her son. Actually, let me rephrase that and clarify that it was not newfound joy, it was re-found (new word!) joy. As Mary focused with me on various aspects of the language of hope, she was utterly and remarkably amazed at the positive impact it had on her son, Alex, whose daily and numerous transitions were Mary's greatest challenge of all.

Mary shared with me her happiness in feeling "empowered" to deal with Alex in ways that were pleasing to God and comforting for her son. Words cannot describe the feeling in my heart when she wrote that to me in an e-mail. As we worked on the language of hope, Mary was learning to use that same approach during her interactions with her son, finding a direct and positive response from Alex. She worked on saying things like, "Alex, I wish I could play longer but I need to make dinner now. We will play more after dinner." In the past she would have been afraid to end the play to make dinner for fear of his outbursts of frustration, leaving her to say in exasperation, "Alex, I have to make dinner! Stop It!" He not only responded well to her new approach, but also life was actually becoming more peaceful overall for Mary. She shared that her son's counselor was so impressed with our work together that she was planning to share my Web site with her other clients. That was nice to hear.

As an experienced parent coach, I am profoundly touched by the ability to help Mary and knowing that Mary

felt significant changes were achieved in her life with her son. Toward the end of our working together, Mary shared that she was actually taking Alex to her church once again, which she had not felt able to do for a long time because his behavior had been too much for her to handle there. Mary had become a more confident mother, once again able to find joy in her daily life with her son.

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Gloria DeGaetano, an acclaimed educator, author, and speaker, is the founder of the Parent Coaching Institute, (PCI), the originator of the parent coaching profession. Ms. DeGaetano developed the innovative Parent Coach Certification® training, a graduate level program offered to professionals working in family support around the globe.

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