

# Parenting to Awakening 'The Practice of Presence'

BY JOYCE LYKE

*How do we enter our children's lives  
with presence and attunement?*

*How do we take the invitation by their  
grooves of being present, of living in the  
moment, to facilitate our own awakening?*

*All spiritual traditions teach the impor-  
tance of being in the moment-- it is the  
doorway to what it means to 'Awaken.'*

**Being present with our children – the quality of our attention is paramount; it means everything to them, and is crucial to our own awakening.** This 'quality of attention' lets them know they are loved, cared for, and valued for who they are. A healthy self-esteem is important to the development of a strong and resilient sense of self. Your devoted interest in them facilitates this crucial development. They grow up feeling who they are matters, who they are is valuable and precious. They take shape knowing they are appreciated and respected as human beings. This in turn fosters a sense of confidence in their ability to function in the world.

During those first three years of life, children are inherently beings of presence whose Essential Nature can be easily recognized. Their Essence has not receded into the background, not yet covered over by their developing personality. They are in the moment and present with all that is occurring in their feelings, their body, and with you, their caretaker. Children of all ages are naturally present and aware of the subtle nuances of their environment, but in those first three years their Essential Nature -- Presence -- is more apparent.

*Before you can be present  
with your child you need to learn  
to be present to yourself.*

What does this mean, being present to yourself? Being present is paying attention to what is occurring in each moment within you and within the interactions with your child. Being present is **'sensing, looking and listening'**. These are the three pillars of a deep

spiritual practice. In each moment taking note of your experience, inside and outside. Sensing your arms and legs, feeling for sensation in your body. What is happening within you, i.e., your thoughts, your feelings, emotions, your body sensations? What is happening around you in your physical environment, i.e., the sights, smells, and sounds, who and what is in your field of awareness?

To notice what is occurring in each moment is to take stock of the current situation: this is the **'practice of presence.'** What do you feel? What do you see? What are you hearing? Who is it that is listening? As adults, this fundamental daily practice, is vitally important for our children, and for our own 'spiritual awakening'. If you engage in this practice in a daily way while caring for your children it has the potential to transform your life, and deepen your connection to your children. Overtime, if you sense, look and listen with regularity, this practice will change who you are, enliven and deepen who you take yourself to be. It is one of the doorways to awakening to your True Nature.

To practice presence with your child is best done when you are doing simple activities, like playing in the sand, reading a book together, walking in nature, or an activity you both enjoy, where it is easier to sense, look and listen. Parents can also do this practice on their own while doing dishes, vacuuming, washing the car, simple tasks. After you are more present with the practice you can begin to apply it doing complex tasks, i.e., working on your computer, reading, relating to people, etc. As activities become more challenging and your children become older, the same practice applies, continue to stay present with your experience. Encourage your older children to stay present by reminding them to observe what is around them, to feel their feet in the moment, to sense their experience, be aware of their feelings and thoughts which helps them to be present within themselves.

*During the Practice of Presence,  
our attention becomes equally divided  
between our self and our child.*

In order to be more present with your child, it is fundamentally important to begin by being present with yourself. This is a divided attention, 50% being aware of yourself and your inner experience, and 50% of your attention on your child being aware of what is going on for them.

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### **Ten Activities to do with Children that Develop Presence by Being Present**

**Spend Time in Nature:** Take them to a park, the beach, the tide pools, a river, or walk in the forest where they can connect with the trees, the ground, the birds, squirrels, the small creatures that live in those different environments. Pick up objects, small rocks, pine cones, and feel them, ask questions about what they see and feel? Ask them if they sense the quiet, how do they feel being here? If the children are older, bring binoculars, a compass, a fishing pole, things that may stimulate their interest in the moment. Pack a lunch and make a morning of it or an afternoon. Nature provides a rich environment that is important for their sensory awareness, and awareness of their own body, which in turn develops capable, strong, aware and balanced children.

**Body Awareness:** Help them learn to be in their body by doing different physical activities. Simple yoga stretches, there are many children's yoga books available today. This can be done at any age. I began doing yoga with my granddaughter before she was a year old, we did the child's pose, the downward dog. She was much better at those poses than I was! It became a game when I entered the room she would kick a leg up and I would say, yoga? We were communicating before she had verbal language, it was called body language.

All kinds of sports, and focused outdoor activities can help children learn balance, coordination, and develop strength. Encourage children to connect with the ground by taking their shoes off, feeling the earth underneath them, the sand, the water, the sun, teaching about the elements through these experiences. Have fun playing games in the moment being aware of the environment, both indoors and outdoors.

These physical activities can teach presence and encourage a groundedness and connection with their

body and the earth. It is vital to take them away from electronic devices, which encourage a disconnection from the body.

**Water Play:** This can begin at any age. Children are fascinated with water, faucets, the flow of water, getting wet. Again, this activity fosters being present in the moment. While taking a bath, playing outdoors with a bucket of water or small plastic pool. As children get older water sports are a fantastic way of being present in the body, through learning balance, coordination, standing on a paddle board, or playing in a swimming pool, learning to dive and swim underwater. Water has a soothing effect on the autonomic nervous system, often calming and relaxing children.

**Writing Stories:** My mother was a reading specialist for elementary school children. She taught the importance of letting your child tell a story and the parents writing it down word for word. When they are old enough you can ask them to read the story back to you. This activity has multiple benefits; quality time, encourages creative imaginary thinking, and supports children to begin to read. This was my two grandson's favorite activity we did together. For years, before bed, they would each tell me a story and I would write it down – we have a large book of fun stories today.

**Simple Art Projects:** This can be for any age. Keeping the project simple to foster presence, as this is a time to sense yourself while you are doing the project. My granddaughter and I will sit out on the patio and paint. I find it quite enjoyable to freely paint without any idea of what I am painting, it is liberating and refreshing, and opens the intimate space between us.

**Encouraging Curiosity:** Children are naturally curious spirits. Curiosity is a quality of the heart as well as the mind. This is demonstrated during infancy when babies put things in their mouth, grabbing and pulling objects towards them. It is a very strong desire to taste, touch, and feel their immediate environment. When they become 2-5 be aware of their curious questions, and let yourself be curious about things with them.

**Teaching Compassion:** Teaching children kindness toward themselves and others, being gentle with their pets. Being kind toward your children, show-

ing empathy, sensitivity for their feelings models to them how to treat themselves and others.

**Practice Silence with your Child:** Encouraging children to spend quiet time can be nourishing. These could be times when you are doing an activity, painting, walking, driving in the car, but suggest we do this in silence. A few moments of quiet helps them to turn inward to be with the moment with themselves, without talking.

**Make Time for Personal Reflection:** At the end of the day, before bed, at the dinner table take time to reflect on the day. What was a good or enjoyable part of your day? What was a challenging or difficult part of your day. How do you feel about the today? Listening to their feelings and sharing your feelings is an important habit to get into.

**Meditation:** Helps calm and center us, clears the mind, and deepens our experience of Presence. A regular meditation practice helps us stay focused in our daily life. Teaching young children to meditate takes patience, we need to allow them time to wiggle, and giggle, make it light and fun. Let them ring the bell to begin and end the meditation. Young children can learn to sit for a few minutes. Setting an example of meditating yourself, telling your children how it feels and what the benefits are for you makes an imprint on them. Help them settle down and focus on their breath. Even for a few minutes of quiet can be beneficial for them. For younger children you can use meditation CD's like: "Sitting still like a frog."

**These activities I am suggesting are all part of the Practice of Presence.** You could do these activities and not be in touch with yourself and it would be a different experience. If you turn your focus inward and are more present with your felt sense it will deepen and enrich the moment for yourself and your child. What I am suggesting is that by practicing this "quality of attention" focusing on yourself, your inner nature, Presence can arise . . . for both you and your children.

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#### **End of chapter adult exercise:**

I would like you to spend the next ten minutes slowly walking while you are sensing your arms and legs, looking and listening. I would like you to observe how this is for you. Do you sense but forget to look? Do you hear more than sense? Are you more aware of your external environment than your inner experience? Can bring your awareness inward to notice subtle body sensations? Notice what is more dominant in your experience. See if you can be present with all parts of this practice. What is it that takes you away from being present to your direct experience?

We are often pre-occupied in our minds and not aware of our body. It is important to feel our subtle sensations, to sense our emotions and feelings, this is what takes us inward. This inward focus is what opens our inner terrain, our spiritual depth, which is Presence. The quality of attention you give to yourself is the gateway to your spiritual self, and a blessing to discover who you truly are, and who your children are becoming.