

Ego and the Baby

or why your colleagues huff and puff when you trust infants.

Start with full attention

As with any undertaking, working with infants offers us opportunities-one-after-another to learn where we could soften more into our hearts. The first and obvious place to start is learning to give the child full attention, particularly when you are feeding, changing, dressing or bathing the baby. Full attention means there is nothing else going on your mind; no wondering when your break is, no planning the night out with the gals, no wondering what the lotto numbers are; nothing but full attention with the baby.

Being present is a present

Some people call that kind of attention a spiritual practice, and it is. It is your spirit practising the kind of attention which comes from the Intelligence of your Heart. Full attention is focused and it neither judges nor labels. It just notices. Every little thing. That kind of attention allows you to respond to **what-is**, rather than to react out of the ideas-in-your-head.

That is another way of saying that full attention allows you to be in the present moment, exactly as all infants are, all of the time. It is a meeting of hearts, and it is exactly what the infant-new-to-this-world needs to unfold the nascent biological structures within his or her own brain and heart.

The power of now

Living in the present moment, or living in the now, is a spiritual practice. That doesn't mean it is something all airy-fairy, it is 100% practical. It is what you do and how you do it. It is something you 'be', and it allows the infants to **be** too. It is the dance of deep friendship and respect. When you soften into this deep respect with children you learn to notice every little thing and to trust them. In your respect and noticing every little thing, you get to trust that children can sort a lot out from their own inner resources, a lot more than most of us give them credit for.

Our trust grows with practise

Trusting children to sort their way through frustration, emotions and conflict grows yet more trust. We become more at ease being in the present moment just noticing all that is happening. It is not that we are indifferent when we just notice, it is just that we are respectful enough not to offer support until the child needs it. I know there is a fine line between when enough is too much, but the ears of the heart are exquisitely tuned to such details and they will let you know exactly when support is required.



Helping, interfering or supporting?

You and I both know the extreme frustration when we are trying to do something and it is not going right first go. Someone is hanging over your shoulder saying “Here, I’ll do it for you.” I don’t know about you, but I feel like whacking them - which isn’t very respectful or spiritual - but they should trust that I can keep trying till I get it. And if I can’t get it, then that will be when I will call on them for their expertise and their support.

Trust me, I know what I am doing

It is this same scenario in childcare centres which offers us yet another opportunity to soften into our hearts, but this time with our colleagues not the babies. There you are tuned in with full attention, and you are trusting the babies to know what they want to do and how they want to do it. You will be sitting there on the floor with them, residing in your heart (a measurable physiological state called heart coherence), and just noticing. It can look as though you are doing nothing to your colleagues if they do not understand that you are actually very busy - very busy **being**, but not doing.

Enter ego

This is where ego comes into it; your colleague’s ego, and yours too if you are not very careful. There is nothing wrong with ego per se, it is a psychological task to develop a good strong ego as we grow up. Having achieved that, it is also useful to understand how our ego can cause the conflict and separation which is the opposite of the heart coherence required for a centre (and the souls in it) to thrive. Ego likes to be ‘better than’, and ego **must** be right, because ego needs the ‘other’ to survive. Being right means making someone else wrong of course, and ego is brilliant at making others wrong.

Lazy bones

For the colleagues whose **idea** of being a ‘good childcare worker’ is one of entertaining, interacting, initiating, explaining and doing, you can be judged as lazy when you are sitting there just noticing. Your **being** (instead of doing) can cause them to huff and puff, and then they go about being even busier thereby letting everyone know that at least **they** are being ‘a good and competent childcare worker’. This is ego huffing and puffing, and it is subconscious. That means it is below the level of your colleague’s



Perfectly balanced. For the child who has had ‘unassisted motor development’ this is easy.

awareness, it is simply a reaction. Your colleague is reacting to you out of a whole bunch of **ideas** (a mental construct) that they identify with; “I am a good childcare worker, and good childcare workers entertain, interact, initiate, explain and keep very very busy.”

Learn to recognise ego when you see it in others

With their eyebrows raised at your perceived inactivity, colleagues can see your lack of intervention when a child is managing conflict, frustration, emotion or executing balancing acts as bordering on neglect. Huffing and puffing will now be accompanied by them swooping in and almost theatrically extracting the children and ‘fixing’ the situation. I mean, how else will they get the message through to you that you need to buck up your ideas? This is ego again; your colleague’s ego reacting to their **ideas** of a good and competent childcare worker. It is not the divine part of your colleague, **and your job is to learn to tell the difference**. Learn to see when your colleague has tripped into ego, and when they are residing in their heart. Ego spotting can help you learn to soften into the kindness of your heart as you differentiate between your colleagues’ egoic reactions and their Divine Selves.

Ego meets ego - your reactions to their reactions

So they think you are lazy and negligent, and now you feel you have been wronged because you have been following the-best-up-to-date-best-practise. Welcome to your ego. Your ego has joined theirs in the classic battle of Right and Wrong, and now you are right and they are wrong. Your ego, like theirs, is subconscious, below the radar of your awareness. That doesn’t mean you can’t recognise it though. You can begin to loosen it’s destructive reactivity; all you need to do is just notice what you are thinking and feeling. It’s that full attention again, only this time with yourself. Noticing brings the unnoticed into your awareness, it grows your consciousness and begins to dissolve the destructive structure of ego. That is called growing up.

Yes we can

Growing up means bowing out of playing the Right and Wrong game. As long as you are sure in your own heart that you are following best practise **as you understand it**, you can find it in your heart to let go of your reactions to their reactions. You might need to turn up your hearing aid and adjust your glasses to ‘just notice’ whether you too are huffing and puffing when your colleagues continually entertain the children, or when they don’t trust infants and toddlers enough to allow them to find solutions from their own vast inner resources. Yes indeed, there will be plenty of opportunities to learn how to soften into the Heart in an early childhood centre. You could say being an early childhood teacher is a spiritual practice.

Pennie Brownlee



Samantha trusts Leela,
Leela trusts Samantha.
This is Samantha’s shoulder ▶