

# Six Great Expectations for Earthlings

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Like the littlest doll inside a set of Babushka Dollies, the baby in the womb is supported and provided for by the womb in which she is enclosed. The womb and placenta in their turn are supported and provided for by the mother. The mother in her turn is supported and provided for by the Earth Mother. This nesting is sublime in design. It is the design of every baby to bond, firstly in and with the womb. After the birth, the second bonding is between the baby and her mother. When that partnership is in firmly place, it acts as the platform for the third bonding which is between the baby and the earth. These three bondings are essential for growing healthy Earthlings, but if the conditions are not right they can fail.



The fertilised human egg will depend on the first matrix for his or her survival. The womb is the matrix that provides all the child needs until the shift to the next matrix\*.

\*Matrix: *noun, plural matrices*. A substance, situation or environment in which something has its origin, takes form, or is enclosed.



The baby will grow in the womb for forty weeks, give or take a week or two. In the womb the baby will hear her mother's heart and this will be her touchstone, this will be what she listens for when she is born to tell her she's safe with her next matrix. The heart is much much more than a pump, it is the seat of divine intelligence. No kidding.



The mother is the second matrix. It is she who anchors the child for the next stretch of development from birth to four years. It is she who acts as the 'trainer wheels of nurture and balance' until the child gets her 'systems' up and running and can regulate her 'state' independently. Bill Plotkin calls the child in this matrix "The Innocent in the Nest".



When the child can keep her systems in balance by herself, it is in the earth mother matrix where the next unfoldings 'have their origin and take form'. Bill Plotkin calls the child in this matrix "The Explorer in the Garden" The explorer still likes to know he can call on the adult if he wants to, this 'back-up-presence' provides the 'safe ground' from which to explore.

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## Great expectations #1

When a baby is born he is expecting one thing and one thing only, to be on or within sight and/or sound of his Mother. Regardless of what the culture might tell you, there is a very good Nature reason for this close, warm, physical partnership. During pregnancy (gestation) the baby depends on the nurturing from the mother via the womb which serves as a 'nest'. There he grows his little body and structures to the point where they can survive being 'outside of the nest' (without medical assistance). The pattern of Nature is to grow the little Earthling to the stage where he can 'get out of the nest' safely and keep on with his growing on 'the outside of the nest'. Ashley Montague called this 'outside the nest' period *extero-gestation*.

## Get it right in the beginning

Everyone understands that the pregnant mother and her baby are 'a unit'. What our culture has lost sight of is that after the birth the Mother and the baby are still a unit for exactly the same reasons as during pregnancy - the baby needs to be with or on the Mother while his little systems develop and grow to the level of functioning where they can regulate themselves, independently. This takes all of the first year while the sensory-motor brain gets itself up, running and fully functional. And that is only the start of the complex task of emotional regulation, and it is the 'mother matrix'\* that acts as 'the trainer wheels' for this development. This close, warm, sacred partnership is the human baby's Greatest Expectation and meeting it needs to become our first priority as individuals and as a nation if we are to align with the Wisdom of Nature and Nurture. It is the safety and security of the close relationship that allows the baby's systems to relax into the harmonious state, the state that frees him to enter the experiences which simultaneously grow and unfold him.

*\* If it cannot be the mother then there must be a substitute set of 'trainer wheels of nurture': father, aunty, grandmother...*

*In the childcare situation centres are implementing primary care (one main carer for the child, their trusted other\*\*) because not to do so is cruelty. Failing to provide primary care ignores every baby's and child's greatest need - to have an emotional anchor for emotional safety and stability.*

*\*\* I am not keen on the term 'key teacher' because it elevates teaching above caring. Humans of every age would choose caring over teaching any day if they were looking to the big things like happiness, belonging and love. How much more-so for the young child who has to have caring to unfold her potential so that she can make the most of any teaching?*

## Great expectations #2

Having established the relationship, the safe place from which to continue growing and unfolding, the child is expecting freedom: the freedom to move, freedom to explore and freedom to play. When not 'in the arms/on the back' of her Mother, the baby is driven to move. The patterns of the movement are within the child but the child needs the freedom to respond to those urges. In responding, the child not only unfolds the pattern, but she grows both her body and brain at the same time. Carla Hannaford points us in the right direction when she reminds us, "Movement is the architect of the brain." This is co-creation, and the starting position for this ballet of unfolding and growing is on the back, on the ground (or the floor). Every baby who is lucky enough to be nurtured naturally by being placed on the back - and not in a bouncer, high chair, jumping swing,

‘walker’, ‘sitter’ etc - will demonstrate the Wisdom of Nature by unfolding perfect balance, agility and posture. These children think and process, look and move very differently from those whose big-people-in-their-lives didn’t know how to support them naturally. Children allowed the freedom to move are at home, balanced and agile in their bodies, they are set up perfectly for the exploration and adventurous play that is coded into them, awaiting its turn to unfold and grow.

### **Great expectations #3**

Every child expects to play. They are not expecting our obsession with literacy and numeracy, they are expecting to play. There are patterns of play coded into the Earthling just waiting for the chance for expression, and in the expression of those play patterns the child will grow and develop. Many of human play patterns are patterns shared by others in the mammal family, patterns that grow agility and social competence, build strength and usher in pleasure: think running, jumping, leaping, swinging, tug-of-war, chasey, rolling, tumbling, wrestling. These important patterns are very often stopped or forbidden by grown-ups who are unaware of the benefits to the child. Better to allow the play patterns, and if you need to, divert them to a more suitable setting.

### **Play is the whole point of being human**

Human Earthlings have an ‘old mammalian brain’, the limbic system. It is the emotional-relational brain, and if you have seen documentaries about the complex social communication systems in wolf packs, horse herds, whale pods... you will know that growing this part of our being is where our happiness lies: the ability to get on gracefully and graciously with our own kind. As every mammal instinctively knows, it is play that grows this part of our brain and being. You don’t see too many dolphins or cows out there with alphabet friezes and counting charts - that stuff all belongs to the neocortex, the ‘great thinking brain’ or the ‘new mammalian brain’. The neocortex itself requires a fully developed limbic system for it’s own intelligence to be able to unfold its limitless potential. As in building any structure - including the structure of the brain - every effort goes into completing the foundations before you think about building the ground floor or the first floor. By analogy, our obsession with literacy and numeracy (both amazing human skills) is destructive when it takes time from the focused play required for constructing the ‘foundations and ground floor.’ This obsession with literacy and numeracy is politically driven and is the equivalent of building the roof onto the concrete-foundation pad.

### **Great expectations #4**

Every child expects to play outside in Nature - that is, they do until they contract the fatal sedentary-stay-inside-and-be-entertained-habit. Outside, all of the things we have talked about come into their own. The child is secure and can regulate her own emotional and physiological systems thanks to the ‘trainer wheels’ of that sacred first relationship, she has incarnated into her body and is at home there, thanks to the freedom of movement, exploration and play - and now she can go outside and play\*\*\*. For hundreds of thousands of years every child has played outside. In doing so they have grown their sense of belonging beyond their parents, beyond their wider family-tribe-community, and into the part of Nature where they live. Many cultures

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recognise this stage of the ‘nested-bonding’ in their language by referring to Nature as kin. They speak about Mother Earth, Father Sky, Father Sun, Grandmother Moon. Many cultures refer to stones, mountains, rivers, plants and animals as brothers and sisters, or as the Lakota people sum it up, Mitakuye Oyasin, All Our Relations. This belonging is the belonging every Earthling is patterned to realise. It ushers in a contentment and grounding that underpins the life-journey. It includes - and goes far beyond - the ‘Belonging’ written into our NZ early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki.

*\*\*\*This is not the first time she has been out to play, she has been taken outside from the very beginning: into the garden, to the river, to the park, into the orchard, to the beach, into the bush... Just as the baby in the womb listened to the heart to know about her next matrix, the child imprints with Nature and the earth before shifting to the earth matrix.*



Every indigenous culture has understood that the earth is the great mother. As Dr Rangimarie Rose Pere says, “If you are talking about parenting you start with the earth. She’s the Great Mother, she’s the Great Teacher”. Growing up knowing the living earth as your mother is very different from growing up knowing her only as dirt and minerals.

The earth is the third matrix - the situation-environment in which the next layers and patterns of children’s development have their origin and from which they take form. The child will leave this matrix for the next at seven when her mind has formed. That’s why smarter education systems than ours leave abstract learning till six or seven.

“A Chinese tale tells of some men sent to harm a young girl, who upon seeing her beauty, became her protectors rather than her violators. That’s how I felt seeing the Earth for the first time. I could not help but love and cherish her.” Taylor Wang, astronaut. Not all of us can go out into space to ‘wake up’ but we can go outside with an open heart and mindfully look at a daisy, or a sparrow... that will do it.

### Great expectations #5

Children are expecting Life outside. For hundreds of thousands of years children have left the cave or the castle to play outside in the grass, the stream, the sand, the garden, the bush, the trees, the snow. What they have found in their particular eco-niche is family, All Our Relations - the green and growing ones, the swimmers, the slitherers, the crawlers, the hoppers, the winged ones, the four leggeds.... Depending on the culture and example of the big-people-in-their-lives,

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they have cared for these Earthlings, hunted them for food, taunted them for pleasure, killed them for power, and latterly poisoned them for convenience. The way you learn to behave with your wider family decides how you will care for the Family on Earth, including your own family when and if you make one. You model and meet this expectation when you understand All Life is Sacred and you live your Life accordingly.

Children expecting Life outside are let down when we who control their environment betray them. Betray is a hefty word, but we do betray children when we strip the Earth of Life to make it convenient for us. Grass and mud are replaced with safety-surface and paving, trees are replaced with garish plastic climbing structures, bushes are replaced by garish plastic huts, gardens are not replaced. This modelling of gross disrespect for Life and the Earth is legal and 'approved' by the ministry of education. Lucky are the children in Europe where the actual eco-niche can be the childcare 'centre' itself - be it lake-side, mountain pasture, seaside, forest or copse. Nationally, we will know we are making progress in nurturing our children when our ministry gets wise enough to license programmes instead of its restrictive practice of issuing licenses for premises only.



## Great expectations #6

Every child is born longing for and expecting stories. As author Ursula Le Guin noted, "There have been great cultures that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories." Stories and play combine to begin an alchemy in the neocortex, the alchemy of imaginative play. This uniquely human form of play is the foundation of symbolic, metaphoric and abstract thinking upon which all higher learning depends, and once again, it is the loop of creation. The child takes images stored from previous experience and overlays them into time-space reality creating a new reality. This reality is not a virtual reality, this reality is multidimensional and the child lives within it, in charge of her 'world', and modulating it. If that sounds a bit abstract, it is simple: The child pretends that the fallen tree is a house (overlays her house image onto the tree creating a new reality) and 'climbs up the stairs to the bedroom' (lives within her new reality in all of her human dimensions). She invites her friend to join her and tells her she can have the 'top bunk'. Down in the kitchen hydrangea leaves 'become' plates, sticks become cutlery and conkers are the (metaphors standing for) hamburgers. This play becomes richer and richer the more children do it. The richer it becomes the more brain connections are

made as images and symbols are recalled, combined, joined, synthesised, created. Every one of these neurological events creates the 'brain-grunt' that will power future symbolic abstract thinking, including reading, writing and calculus. Play researcher Stuart Brown notes that imaginary play with friends builds the social literacy (the ability to read people and interact with them cooperatively) that is crucial to a child's long-term health and happiness.

The heart is the compass for all Earthlings. Listen to the subtle wisdom of your heart and let it guide you as you meet the expectations above. You'll know when your heart is pointing you in the right direction for each child, because it feels right. The question "Does it feel right?" is the ultimate check on whether or not it is the heart you are hearing. And if it does feel right, follow your heart and you will end up in the right place. Guaranteed.

Pennie Brownlee • November 2012

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### Recommended reading:

***Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World***

by Bill Plotkin

***The Death of Religion and the Rebirth of Spirit: A Return to the Intelligence of the Heart***

by Joseph Chilton Pearce

***The Biology of Transcendence: A Blueprint for the Human Spirit***

by Joseph Chilton Pearce

***Magical Child***

by Joseph Chilton Pearce

***Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination and Invigorates the Soul***

by Stuart Brown

### And a link:

***Jeremy Rifkin: The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis***

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EZv9H62xm0>

**Warning:** As Jeremy says, "I want to start off on a very sombre note" and he does. But we are all citizens of this planet, all in it together and we need to see what kind of future we are preparing our children for. If you aren't brave enough to do sombre, do this edited version - you will still learn a lot about your children's capabilities and what that means for us.

**RSA: The Empathic Civilisation** - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7AWnfFRc7g>

