



An excerpt from *Infants and Children: An introduction to emotional development* by Mirabelle Maslin

How can we prepare a child for life?

How can we prepare a child for life, when we do not know what the future might hold? Parents of children born at the end of the nineteenth century would have no idea that their offspring would have to face two world wars. And if they had known this, how could they have prepared them? The answers to such questions seem imponderable.

Parents of modern children know that they have brought new people into a world of rising sea levels, dangerous levels of pollution of the environment, and necessary focus on the 'carbon footprint', to name but a few common concerns. What must they do to prepare their children for adult life?

In recent times, during a visit to a large well-run primary school, the very experienced head teacher told me that although she did everything she could to prepare the pupils for their future, there were imponderable matters involved. She gave the simple example of handwriting. She explained that teaching children handwriting was still part of the central curriculum, but pointed out that more and more the use of computer keyboards was the most common way of writing. Could it be that in the future the skill of handwriting would no longer be needed?

As parents, we have to teach our children about day-to-day physical safety, and to help them to comprehend and observe the rules and norms of our current culture. However, the rules and norms of our society will change over time, and in a world where foreign travel is still prolific, many people will be required to observe and adapt to the rules and norms of cultures that are different from their own.

Changes within a culture can be confusing to the elderly, and they can be confusing even to those who are not yet elderly. At a hospital appointment some years ago, I was directed to lie on an examination couch. Having not been a hospital outpatient for some years, I was unaware of changes in protocols. I stood by the couch, and began to remove my shoes. 'Don't take your shoes off!' the doctor commanded. He did not seem angry or aggressive, but there was a

force in his voice that I found confusing. Mutely, I secured my shoes, climbed on to the couch, and lay down, feeling frozen and a little tearful. Later examination of my feelings in the relative safety of being away from the hospital premises led me to consider how, as a child, it had been impressed upon me, very firmly indeed, that I must never climb on a bed with my shoes on. I had been left in no doubt that such an action would attract some kind of dire consequence – one which I had no desire to experience.

Although with the benefit of my adult awareness and intelligence I could imagine retrospectively that the doctor was acting on a need to limit the spread of infections such as MRSA, the child inside me was disturbed. In her early years she had been given an unequivocal rule about shoes, yet that had now just been completely countermanded, and without any warning.

This example led me to reflect yet again on the child's position. The first set of rules that are presented to him are, in his inner world, the only set of rules. How then do we prepare him for necessary change and evolution of the particular form of reality that has been described to him through such rules? How can we rear children who are intrinsically flexible? With the perils that our current world is presenting to us all, above everything else, we need people who are flexible, in a calm way. This is an essential prerequisite for the discovery and development of pathways that will help not only the individual, but also have the potential of helping every one of us.

Emotional security is the essential core of a balanced life. It is the cornerstone of meaningful relationship, and of the experience of being part of the human race. Without it, real collaboration is impossible. What we can aspire to do is to give our children the kind of interaction that they need in order to develop a secure internal emotional base from which to face the unknown.

A parent's ability to be able to see and understand things through the eyes of their child is fundamental.

The child will come to feel truly known by the parent, and the parent helps him or her to make sense of what surrounds them. And where can true comfort be found? True comfort arises from the knowledge of a relationship that is based on trust. And what about the needs of the child of the past that dwells inside each 'adult' state?

This new book from author and therapist Mirabelle Maslin opens up a whole new world of understanding for parents and carers.