

Fostering Healthy Chakras in Children



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Hope for a better future depends on raising children without the traumas and abuses that plague so many people struggling through recovery today. These abuses often occurred at the hands of well-meaning but ignorant parents, many of whom were simply responding from their own unhealed wounds, wounds they had received from the previous generation, which may have been passed on through family and culture for many generations before that. As adults today undergo the difficult journey of healing these wounds, they understandably want to avoid at all costs, inflicting similar difficulties upon their own children.

Today's children need intelligent guidance that supports their growth and integration in body, mind, and spirit. Finding spiritual models that can be applied to children -- models that address their development in a way that honors the different stages of a child's life can be difficult. Schools educate the mind, but suppress the body's natural urge to run and play. Daniel Goleman, in his best-selling book, *Emotional Intelligence*, illustrates the need to educate and mature the emotions before the intellect. Some children grew up completely eschewing religion, because they were made to sit on hard pews, or read books that were intellectually beyond their understanding, and thus have no interest in spiritual matters when they are older. Others grow up to completely ignore the body, and incur health problems as a result. Still others steer away from colleges and other intellectually demanding tasks because they grew up to believe they didn't have the necessary intelligence, often because they were given tasks as children that were beyond the abilities of their age.

The Chakra System, based on the seven wheel-like energy centers of the body, known as chakras provides a profound mirror to the stages of childhood development. This system shows how the chakras develop sequentially, from bottom to top, as a child matures from birth to adulthood. In my personal growth seminars based on teaching this model as a way to heal adults from their past traumas and current difficulties, I am constantly asked by the parents in the audience, "I have a child who is at this stage right now. What do I do to support his development?"

This question goes beyond simply avoiding abuse -- but moves into the creation of optimal human beings. This occurs through supporting children in all dimensions of their experience -- physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually -- and supporting them in ways that are appropriate for their current level of development.

What follows below is a brief introduction to the chakras and their childhood developmental stages, with simple advice for parents on how to support the unfolding of these important areas in a child's life.

Chakra One: Womb to 1 year

1. Promote Embodiment. The most important thing you can do at this stage is to help your child come fully into her body. Frequent touch, holding, carrying, nurturing, and attendance to physical needs cannot be stressed enough. Your touch affirms your child's physicality. Your holding teaches her to hold herself. Playing with your child helps her develop motor coordination. Playing with her feet and hands, supplying toys she can grasp, playing when she's in the bath, all help stimulate motor development. Setting up an appropriate environment that is safe and comfortable, with age-appropriate toys helps the child relate to the outer world in a positive way.

2. Establish Trust by Allowing Attachment and Bonding. The child's only source of safety is through attachment to the primary caregiver. It is important for the mother (or father if he is primary parent) to be there as consistently as possible during the first year as a ground for the child. This means picking her up when she cries, frequently holding and cuddling her, talking to her, protecting her from loud noises, hunger, cold, or discomfort, and feeding her when she's hungry, rather than by a schedule. Some parents have difficulty allowing this attachment to form, because the child's natural neediness feels too demanding. Allowing this attachment to occur helps the child become more independent later.

Consistency of presence during infancy helps to reconcile the dilemma of trust vs. mistrust in a way that brings hope and confidence. Knowing that the parent is always there allows the child to relax into the development that needs to occur, rather than rise into tension and hypervigilance.

3. Appropriate Day Care. If the mother needs to work during the first year and can't be there with her child, she leaves her child at a disadvantage. Unfortunately, financial circumstances often make this the only option. The best parents can do is provide the healthiest child care possible, acting as advocates to make sure the child gets the care she needs. Making sure the child is touched frequently and appropriately, fed on demand, and cared for by competent adults in an age-appropriate environment are a few things the parents can look into when finding day care. Spending time at the day care with her child until she gets used to it is also helpful. Family day care and in-home babysitting are more likely to offer continuity and consistency, when possible. In addition, the mother needs to understand that the child may need extra nurturing, touch, and mother-child bonding in the evening at home. This is especially demanding on single and/or working mothers who are often exhausted at the end of the day. Yet, time taken for nurturing during the first year pays off in the long run with a calmer and healthier child who makes less demands later.

A feeling of safety comes from a safe environment. Peace in the home, protection from loud noises, sharp objects, falling, cold, and violence of adults or siblings is essential. Remember, environment is self to the infant. What they are embedded in is the first influence on who they are.

When a child is in an unfamiliar environment, such as a store, a park, a doctor's office, or a friend's house, the parent is an island of safety for the child. Understand that your child will be more insecure, and need to come to you again and again for reassurance.

4. Healthy Nourishment. Feeding schedules, though convenient for the parent, do not allow the child to establish her own rhythms, nor do they teach her that the world will respond to her needs. Breast feeding has been proven to be healthier emotionally and physically, as breast milk contains important antibodies, and the experience of breast feeding promotes mother child bonding, through physical closeness. But studies have shown that the emotional state of the mother while feeding is actually more important than whether it comes from a breast or a bottle. A bottle given lovingly is better than a breast given resentfully.¹ Healthy nutrition on the part of the mother, refraining from harmful substances that flow into the milk, such as drugs and alcohol, and healthy nutrition when the child begins eating food are also essential to building a healthy body.

If you successfully handle this stage, you will give your child a healthy foundation from which to meet the many challenges that life will bring. She will have a sense of her own body and aliveness, and a sense of hope and optimism that the world can and will meet her needs.

Chakra Two: 6 to 18 months

1. Allow separation and attachment. Your child will now be in the hatching stage, beginning to separate from you as a parent as his body development allows him more and more movement. Because this is scary to him, he will go back and forth -- moving away and coming back to see if everything's OK. In some ways he will seem even more attached, and this is natural. It is important to support both these movements -- to encourage the separation by offering safe opportunities to explore, and by being warm and loving when reassurance is needed.

2. Provide sensate environment. Your child is exploring the world through his senses. This is his main mode of experience right now. It is important to provide colors and sounds, interesting toys, touch and pleasure through play, and a safe environment to explore. Your voice and attention are a major part of the sensate experience.

3. Support exploration through movement. Your child wants to move about right now. This is not the time for a playpen, and if you must use one, use it only for short periods of time. Instead, find places where he can crawl and walk about safely, where he can run in the park, roll around in the yard, and learn to use his body in its new found joy of movement.

4. Reflect emotions. Your child is learning his emotional language. If you want to teach emotional literacy, it's important to mirror his feelings. Be responsive to his cries and expressions of rage, fear, need or confusion. Don't negate or punish him for his emotions -- he can't help what he feels. Reflect words to show him you understand: "How sad you look right now!" "Are you scared? Do you want Mommy to hold your hand?" Though he can't speak very well yet, he is beginning to understand words by listening. He will understand that his feelings have a name and that even without language he can communicate to someone what he needs or wants.

Be aware of your own emotional needs and states, as well as the emotional "field" in the household. Children pick up our rage and fear, anxiety and joy. Take care of your needs as much as possible so your unresolved emotions are not projected onto the innocent child. Create a positive environment.

Chakra Three: 18 months to 3 years

1. Support autonomy and willfulness. As your child begins to separate, celebrate her independence. Try to support her in her willfulness, hard as it might be, by offering choices whenever possible. Instead of asking, "Do you want Cheerios?" "No!" "Do you want corn flakes?" "No!" "Do you want oatmeal?" "No!" and then getting exasperated, you can say "Do you want Cheerios, corn flakes, or oatmeal?" Or you can pick out two suitable outfits to wear, and give her a chance to choose. Give your child opportunities to feel willful in ways that are safe and appropriate.

2. Encourage self-esteem. As the ego identity is forming at this stage, be sure to take delight in your child's accomplishments and make her feel appreciated. Support her independence without rejecting her. If you give your child tasks that she can successfully accomplish, she will develop confidence. Age-appropriate puzzles and toys, small jobs around the house, like putting toys in a box or picking up stuffed animals can help to foster a basic sense of confidence. If she insists on doing a task that is beyond her abilities, such as tying her shoes, help her accomplish it. By all means, refrain from getting critical or overly frustrated by her awkward attempts to do simple things. Have patience. It will pay off in the long run.

3. Successful toilet training. Your child will indicate to you when she's ready for toilet training. She will show an interest in the toilet and adult bathroom activities. She may tell you when she's wet or resist diapers when you're putting them on. She will stay dry for longer periods of time. Sphincter muscles are not capable of holding on until the child is 18 months to 2 years. It may not be until age 3 that she can go all night without a diaper. If you wait until the time is right, she will feel a sense of pride over this new adult behavior, rather than engage in a fruitless battle of wills.

Rewards for successful behavior go farther than punishments for mistakes, which only create shame. Find treats that can be given as reinforcers, as well as hugging, clapping and verbal appreciation.

4. *Appropriate discipline.* In supporting your child's autonomy and will, you obviously cannot relinquish all control. There needs to be appropriate limits, firmly given. Your child cannot understand sophisticated reasoning, but simple cause and effect statements, like: "Doggie bites! Don't touch!" can be understood. Severe punishment teaches aggressive behavior and fosters shame. Withdrawal of love puts the third and fourth chakras at odds, and stimulates the child's insecurity and need for approval.

Instead, try to divert your child's attention to something more appropriate. If you take the remote channel changer out of her mouth, don't yell at her when she cries. Give her something else to hold. Remove her from dangerous situations. Limits set firmly and consistently for short periods of time (such as time out in one's room alone for a few minutes) can be more effective than anger or withdrawal. Children are highly sensitive to parent's approval at this stage. When you must, disapprove of the behavior and not the child.

Chakra Four Ages 4 - 7

1. *Pay attention to how you model relationships.* Children at this age are learning about social roles by identification and imitation. "Parental identification allows children to feel that their parents are with them even when not physically present."² This means your child will internalize your behavior as a part of himself. If you are angry and aggressive, you will teach him to be angry and aggressive in his relationship with himself and others. As he grows into an awareness of relationships around him, model balanced, loving relationships for him to observe and be a part of.

2. *Model empathy and moral behavior.* Identification with you as parent will also give him a basis for moral behavior. Explain to him why you do certain things and refrain from others. "We're going to take cookies to Mrs. Smith, because she's all alone and it will make her feel better." "See how the baby likes it when you smile at her?" "We don't eat candy before dinner because it doesn't leave room for the food that makes bones and muscles."

Also, be aware that you are modeling gender behavior. Be careful not to support overly sexist or narrow interpretations of how men or women behave. Treat your boy and girl children with equal affection, responsibility, and respect. Allow your child to see a wide range of acceptable behavior. Let your daughter be aware of models of strong women. Let your son know that he won't lose his masculinity by showing his softer feelings.

3. *Explain relationships.* Your child is trying to understand how everything he discovers goes with everything else. The more you can explain such relationships, the more secure he will feel. "We put the puzzle away so we don't lose the pieces." "We put gas in the car, so it will take us where we want to go, just like food gives us energy to run around." "Mommy has to work so she can get money to buy food."

Routine can be very important. If routine is interrupted explain why. "We can't go to the park today because Aunt Mary is coming to visit."

4. Support peer relationships. Your child can now relate to children his own age, with supervision. If he's not in school yet, find ways to get him together with other children. If he is in school, ask him about the other kids he interacts with. Find opportunities to foster friendships outside of school.

Chakra Five: Ages 7 - 12

1. Support communication. Your child has a solid command of language now. Help her use it. Have long discussions with her about the nature of the world. Encourage her to ask questions and take time to answer them. Ask her questions about herself, her feelings and her friends that she can talk about. Be an attentive listener.

Cognitive learning is enormous at this period. School is the major arena for learning and development of confidence. Show interest in your child's studies. Help her with her homework. Ask questions, supply added information, and share what you know. Get involved in school projects. Model good study habits. Give rewards for good performance.

2. Stimulate Creativity. Success is the greatest motivator for developing competence. Supply your child with creative opportunities for industrious expression: art supplies, musical instruments, crafts, dance classes. Model the creative thinking process by searching for new ways to do things, even if it's something as mundane as setting the table. Teach her to use tools. Stimulate creativity with books and movies, concerts and plays.

When your child presents you with something she has created, be sure to appreciate it, even if it only looks like a silly blob. This teaches her that her creations have value, and supports her creative identity. Show the drawing to others; put it up on the refrigerator; invite grandma to the school play.

3. Expose to larger world. Take your child to new places. A trip to the museum, street fairs, the zoo, a traveling vacation, a campout in the mountains. Allow exposure to different ways of life and encourage her horizons to expand.

Chakra Six: Adolescence

1. Support identity formation. Your adolescent is now searching for his own identity. This is not a time to become controlling over details that are not of direct harm, such as hair, clothing, or harmless activities, such as listening to music. Respect his expression of individuality. Encourage his own thinking by asking questions rather than giving answers. Instead of telling him what you did when you were his age, ask what he might tell his son if he were a father.

The roles he tries on will change many times before he settles into his adult identity. Don't worry about the ones you don't like. To strongly oppose it strengthens the likelihood that it will last longer.

2. Support independence. Allow your child to have more of his own life. Encourage ways he can earn his own money, take responsibility for more aspects of his life, such as buying clothes, having his own transportation, creating activities. Let him make some of his own mistakes. If he feels you believe in him, he will more likely behave responsibly.

2. Set clear boundaries. Adolescents nevertheless must have a clear and consistent sense of limits. As they are now old enough for sophisticated reasoning, it is important to include them in the thinking behind those limits, even to the point of letting them suggest alternative ways to address these limits. My son, for example, got an F in English his first quarter of high school. He immediately lost television and computer privileges until the next grading period. Six weeks later, with four weeks left before the next report card was issued, he asked if he could resume some privileges by getting a note from his English teacher that said how much better he was doing. He took the initiative and brought home a note saying he was now doing "A" quality work. I rewarded him for the improvement by reinstating some privileges on a probationary basis.

Chakra Seven. Early adulthood and beyond

Seventh chakra modeling actually occurs throughout childhood. By the time your son or daughter is truly at the seventh chakra stage, they are on their own and your influence will be minimal. But here are some general principles to practice beforehand:

1. Stimulate questioning. Ask don't tell. If your home is a safe place to question and discuss values, your child will learn to think for herself. If she is taught to think through her own problems, with support, learning that there may be many answers to a single situation, she will be more open minded. Involving her in intellectual discussions and asking for her opinion makes her feel that her thought processes are worthwhile.

2. Offer spiritual variety. Spirituality should not be forced on your child. It is better instituted by modeling conscious behavior, and sharing what you can as there is interest. In addition to exposing your child to whatever religion you practice, you can make their spirituality even more solid by giving them some exposure to other religions as well. Explain why your family has chosen the religion you practice. Allow your child to research other cultures and styles of worship. If your religion is best for her, she will come back to it on her own, more solid in her commitment because she's been offered choice. If she chooses another that she finds more fulfilling, it will be an informed choice, rather than a rebellious act.

3. Provide opportunities for education. Learning is the way we feed our seventh chakra and keep our operating system up-to-date. Support learning in whatever way you can, whether it's attending local community college, weekend workshops, a trek to the Himalayas, or a self-imposed course of study. Teach your child to find the lessons in experience. Ask what she's learning from different activities.

4. Let go. When it's time for your young adult to leave home, support and celebrate their independence. It doesn't help to hang to her on nor does it help to push her out the door.

As the parent withdraws control and attachment, the young person will naturally gravitate out into her own world.

Conclusion

As children grow up through the chakras, they don't immediately outgrow the needs of the previous chakra. Children need physical affection all through life, not just in the first and second chakras. They need continual approval for their self-esteem. They need to be talked to, engaged with, and included in family councils and activities.

In my opinion, there is never justification for parents to inflict upon their children sexual activity, physical pain, or shaming criticism. If this occurs, find help for yourself immediately through local parent support groups or your own therapy. Break the cycle. Don't pass on abuse.

Children need love and attention, time and approval. They need to be encouraged, not discouraged. They need to be part of adult society, and they need their individuality to reform that society in ways that are in better harmony with the body, soul, and spirit. Children are the sacred beings of the future. They are the hope of humankind.

Reference:

This was originally part of the text of Dr. Judith's book *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, but the length of the book required that it be cut.

Anodea Judith PhD is considered one of the country's foremost experts on the combination of chakras and therapeutic issues and on the interpretation of the Chakra System for the Western lifestyle. She is best known for the chakra classic, Wheels of Life: A User's Guide to the Chakra System, (Llewellyn, 1987), an illustrated 540 page manual that has come to be considered the definitive work on the subject. With over 100,000 U.S. copies sold and additional printings in Dutch, Spanish, and Italian, it is now in a new revised edition. A second book, co-authored with Selene Vega: The Sevenfold Journey: Reclaiming Mind, Body, and Spirit through the Chakras (Crossing Press, 1993, 289 pp.) arose out of the popular Nine-Month Chakra Intensive, taught by Judith and Vega for over a decade. The Sevenfold Journey is primarily a self-help workbook, with over 100 photos of exercises, and additional suggestions for private, partner, and group activities taken from their workshops. Her most recent written book is the ground-breaking: Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self, released by Celestial Arts in February 1997. This book charts childhood development, related difficulties and techniques for healing them, all within the chakra model. In March of 2000, she released a six-tape audio course called: The Chakra System: A Complete Course in Self-Diagnosis and Healing through Sounds True, Inc. See links for more details and additional writings.

Anodea divides her time between traveling across the country as a popular workshop presenter and retreating to her northern California home, where she conducts a private

healing practice, and continues her research and writing. In addition she continues to teach chakra workshops, alone and with Selene Vega, and to train other practitioners in the use of this work.

Anodea's background includes a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Rosebridge School of Integrative Therapy, a doctorate in Health and Human Services, (focused on mind-body health) from Columbia Pacific University, with additional doctoral work in Systems Theory at Saybrook University. Her studies in healing have included Bioenergetics, trauma recovery, yoga therapy, hypnotherapy, acupressure massage, Gestalt, standard psychotherapy, clairvoyant reading, yoga, Reiki. Her shamanic spiritual training led to ordination in 1985 through the Church of All Worlds.

Anodea has conducted a private healing practice in California for 20 years. Her modes of working have changed and evolved many times over this period, moving from primarily bodywork through psychotherapy, to the present combination of psyche and soma, which she calls Mind-Body Integration. Her work with the chakras adds the spiritual dimension to the presently growing field of Somatic Therapy.

And finally, on the more personal level, Anodea Judith is a dynamic individual with many talents: teacher, healer, priestess, musician, artist, wife and mother, she is well-loved for her integrating work with mind, body, and spirit. She feels deeply concerned about the state of our world, in terms of ecology, ethics, politics, and religion. Feeling that transformation occurs on both an individual and cultural level, Anodea supports a path to empowerment and balance through teaching of life-affirming paths of wisdom. This is achieved through reclamation of our bodies and minds, the environment, and our connection to the powers of Heaven and Earth. She is a dynamic and experienced speaker, workshop presenter, and visionary, dedicated to healing our world and evolving human consciousness.

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