

Introduction

During the winter of 2007, I buried myself under blankets and multiple layers of clothing every night, feeling invigorated even though it was so cold that I could still see my breath as I drifted off to sleep. I was living at the base of the Himalayan Mountains in northern India, and while this winter was particularly cold—and there was no heat—I felt stronger than I had in my entire life.

Sometimes in life we make a wish, and then boom—it comes true. This trip was the answer to my prayers: *What is inner strength?* I had wondered. Why do Tibetans—the primary ethnic group in that part of India—seem so strong, despite being exiled from their country? What do they know that I don't? Are their children the same way? Is it genetic? Can *I* develop this deeper level of power? Can it be created? Or am I stuck with the Healy gene of unhappiness?

My quest was both personal and professional. I was working in a clinic, counseling children to overcome obstacles—Dad's in prison, school stinks, Mom's an alcoholic, you've got a distraction problem—those sorts of obstacles. My clients weren't happy kids; they definitely weren't showing the deeper level of inner strength I saw so vividly in my Tibetan Buddhist friends' children. One day, I wondered aloud

to a friend, “I would love to see how Tibetan kids are raised and compare their upbringing with Western children.” Without skipping a beat, he said, “Why don’t you do it?”

So I called Delta Airlines to inquire about my frequent flyer miles, and as fate would have it, I had just enough miles to go round-trip to South Asia for free! There was nothing stopping me. I booked a flight, took a hiatus from the clinic gig, asked my mother to watch my pug for three months, and allowed the universe to unfold the rest.

Amazing things happened on the way: I got invited to teach at a Tibetan kindergarten as a visiting teacher (just needed to brush up on my Tibetan); a Buddhist friend just happened to be going at the same time; I could attend a two-week program His Holiness the Dalai Lama was teaching on strength and happiness in his temple; and I found a place to stay for three U.S. dollars a night. My way was made magically clear, and it felt as if I was being set up to learn about the Tibetan’s particular type of inner strength—what I came to call *inner confidence*.

One Monk and Many Monkeys

One day late that winter, I started up a mountain in Dharamsala—a mountain that often called my name for a hike after a morning full of Tibetan tots pulling my hair, playing puzzles, and mimicking my every move. On this particular day, I decided to climb it later than normal; the sun was shining, and it felt like it would shine forever.

Hiking alone gave me time to contemplate what I could learn from these Tibetan children and where I could glean more information about the root causes of confidence—and ultimately happiness. Up the mountain, I saw beautiful hills blanketed with rhododendrons and prayer flags streaming from every house. On my way toward

a mountain overlook, I passed a yak, monks reciting mantras, and Tibetans practicing traditional dance for an upcoming performance. The hills were alive with ancient sounds.

Then, all of a sudden, I realized the sun was setting.

I scampered down the mountain as fast as I could. The sun was setting quickly, my water had run out, the temperature was dropping—and now, in front of me, I saw a band of monkeys. No way could I get around those beasts. A big grandfather-type monkey bared his fangs. I knew that when an animal shows his teeth, he's trying to scare you away—and I *was* scared. I just wanted to be in my bed, but my three-dollar-a-day hotel was down the mountain. So I stood in fear and froze.

Well, I thought, I'm going to have to go back up the mountain and find some shelter somewhere. It'll be okay.

It didn't feel okay, though. Seemingly out of nowhere, a monk appeared from the top of the mountain. He looked at me, and then at the monkeys. "They are scared," he said. "Yes, I know," I replied. "I'm scared, too." He smiled and said, "Follow me." Then Mr. Monk walked with certainty past those growling monkeys, exuding an air of confidence.

The monkeys backed down, letting Mr. Monk pass easily. Amazed, I followed him. The monkeys had picked up on my fear, but Mr. Monk's calmness, poise, and inner power parted that band of beasts as though they were the Red Sea. I thanked him profusely, and he evaporated into the night.

Right then, I vowed to discover what that monk knew. How could he display such peace? He only held a *mala*—Buddhist rosary beads—so whatever his secret, I knew it had to be something internal.

Chances are you picked up this book for the same reasons that I traveled to be with Tibetan refugees. You want to feel strong from the inside out, without any proverbial monkeys on your back that limit your life—and you want to raise your children to experience their inner power and strength from the start, instead of constantly battling their fears and feeling frozen in their footsteps.

Arming your children with this type of inner confidence will enable them to pursue their happiest lives, make choices from a place of power, and create whatever their hearts desire. Every parent wants his or her child to be happy and to live his or her best life. As you'll soon discover, this is only possible with the creation of inner confidence.

My Inner Journey

This book was born out of my own need to feel more confident—the type of confidence that isn't easily broken or scared away by a band of equally frightened monkeys. Seeking self-confidence isn't a new search for me. It began in the seventies and eighties; I was a child of parents with problems. I don't blame them for their challenges, but for them, “good parenting” meant putting food on the table and a roof over our heads. That's okay, but it didn't help a sensitive kid learn how to feel good about herself and her capabilities.

For years, I sought confidence in external circumstances—from gold stars, pay raises, and new boyfriends to snazzy cars. That never works, though. At some point, the car breaks, the boyfriend leaves, and the job ends. In our country, the search for confidence in things is also a very common way of pursuing strength. Our culture doesn't shy away from trying to sell you something that guarantees it will make you feel better.

I also spent a significant amount of time attending workshops,

reading books, and seeking mentors who would somehow lift this sense of unworthiness, insecurity, and doubt from the essence of my being. Each moved me in the right direction, but none really solved this situation—until I had the great fortune of connecting with some Buddhist teachers who guided me to my potential and connected me to the truth of inner confidence.

All of this was happening as I counseled children and adults (parents, grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, and others involved in raising children) in a variety of settings, from educational to clinical. In my work life, one question kept reappearing: How could I help this parent, teacher, or child find his or her inner strength to overcome a current challenge and, ultimately, create a happier life? This nagged at me. Even though I had an extensive background in child psychology, multiple degrees, and decades of experience, I still grappled with this question.

There seemed to be a lack of systematic approaches to cultivating this inner strength, and a lack of clarity about how to generate it in our children. More than anyone, these young people need to feel confident from the get-go so they can make choices that empower their dreams and help them be who they came here to be.

My questions persisted, and connecting with Buddhism helped me see solutions. Before I knew it, I was creating and teaching children's Buddhist-based programs around the United States and bringing those ideas abroad in more universal terms.

My organization, Growing Happy Kids, emerged from this experience. We're dedicated to planting the seeds of happiness in kids around the world. This type of enduring happiness isn't just "pie in the sky" anymore; through tapping and sharing the wisdom of the world, it has become more accessible and possible for kids, no matter where they live.

The Study of Inner Confidence

During my time in Asia, I promised myself that I would get to the bottom of what confidence really is and how I can help others develop it—specifically, how I could help parents spark it in their children.

Over the next few years, I pored through tons of clinical data and spoke with countless experts about confidence and self-esteem. Stacks of dense data fill my office. Through translators, I conducted interviews in English, Spanish, German, French, and Tibetan. My goal was to leave no stone unturned.

After many more years of private practice with kids and parents along with studying inner confidence across different disciplines, I discovered that inner confidence manifests as a result of five building blocks. In this book, I share these “Five Building Blocks of Confidence,” so raising confident kids is no longer an elusive topic but something real and possible for every parent—no matter his or her situation.

Confidence Across Cultures

Cultivating confidence cuts across all cultures, and the book in your hands is a result of my international path. I have been fortunate to travel to South Asia, the banks of London, the mountains of Mexico, and across cities in the United States speaking with parents, teaching classes, and working directly with children.

Throughout this book, you’ll find stories from real parents and real kids that help you not only conceptually learn about inner confidence, but “get it” on a practical level. All of my clients’ names have been changed along with many other names mentioned. (Once in a

while, I've kept someone's name so you can better relate to their story, like with Anne Goddard and her amazing son, Colin Goddard.)

One thing that also emerged clearly after interviewing hundreds of parents and kids: The path towards cultivating this deeper sense of strength isn't as mysterious as many of us might think. It simply results from doing things in a certain way—and that way is made clear in the Building Blocks and throughout this book. The development of inner confidence is also a prerequisite for so many positive experiences that it is essential for you to understand what it is and how to bring it to life through the Building Blocks.

What You'll Find in This Book

Growing Happy Kids is divided into three sections. In Part One, we'll define and understand the different types of confidence. I'll share the concept of outer and inner confidence along with the stages of confidence, especially as they relate to children. You'll read real-life stories to solidify your new understanding of confidence as a parent, and spend a little time in honest self-reflection. The definition of inner confidence—a deeper and more lasting type of inner strength—will become perfectly clear. And you'll hear from parents around the planet who are nurturing this deeper type of lasting strength.

Part Two of this book further develops these concepts. You'll learn about:

- **The Five Building Blocks of Confidence**—A new model to understand and develop confidence in children. The Blocks are: Biology, Beliefs, Emotions, Social, and Spiritual.
- **Implementing the Blocks**—Each Block is explained in a down-to-earth format and includes practical ideas to implement each one.

- **The Confidence-Happiness Connection**—Inner confidence is a prerequisite for lasting happiness.

Each of these chapters offers new ideas, real-life stories, and suggestions to make your busy parenting life easier. The goal isn't to give you more to do, but to make your time with your child as effective as possible. If you want to raise a child to be confident from the inside out, this book will help you accomplish that goal.

It's one of the most worthy goals any parent can hope to achieve. An inwardly confident child can:

- Persevere and progress in the face of problems
- Become self-reliant
- Trust himself or herself
- Become a role model of real strength
- Follow his or her dreams
- Fulfill his or her potential
- Develop a deep and abiding sense of happiness

Today's parents want children to become strong from the inside out and lead their happiest lives. This all begins with the creation of inner confidence.

In Part Three, we'll explore what to do when confidence breaks and how outer confidence alone always leads to disappointment. You'll be given "warning signs" of wobbly confidence and practical suggestions for course-correcting your child's sense of confidence. You'll learn how to guide a child to let go of negative thoughts and move beyond any mental limitations to begin seeing himself or herself as the incredibly strong person he or she is inside.

Finally, I'll offer practical resources that you can refer to repeat-

edly. Each exercise is provided to spark your own sense of play and purpose as you cultivate your child's inner confidence.

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Inner confidence doesn't happen overnight. The path to this deeper level of strength and poise occurs over many days, weeks, and years. Since you'll be living on Planet Earth anyway, these moments might as well mean something; make the ones you spend with your child valuable, so when you are no longer here, your son or daughter will still have the greatest gift you could ever offer: a sense of inner strength he or she can harness to create their happiest lives.

My path to this deeper level of confidence is still unfolding. I'm both a teacher and a student, but I have come to a place of inner confidence—I truly know that no matter what happens in the outer world, my inner self is strong and can persevere. I am no longer plagued by feelings of insecurity, doubt, and a sense of uncertainty. Implementing the ideas in this book immediately pointed me in the right direction and transformed my life as well as my clients' lives. I am living proof that these Building Blocks of Confidence work!

It is my wish that this book empowers you and gives you the strength you need to cultivate inner confidence in yourself and children—so all of you can feel a greater sense of inner peace and live your happiest lives.