Blueprint for Transforming the Lives of Children

Agreement on a set of guiding principles for all family members supports enjoyable, confident parenting and provides children with a consistent, supportive environment. Categorized below are the Alliance for Transforming the Lives of Children principles of parenting and related actions to transform the lives of children, parents, and society.

Transformation Category	Principles	Actions for Parents, Caregivers, and/or Society
A. Consciously Conceiving	<p>A. Parents create a strong foundation for family life when they consciously conceive or adopt and are committed to understand and meet the child's needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents welcome children best when they consciously prepare their own bodies, minds, and spirits for pregnancy and birth, and think of conception as a deep commitment between themselves and the baby.• Even when pregnancy is unplanned, both parents can create a healthy, nurturing environment for their child.	<p>A. Encourage prospective parents to carefully consider their readiness to assume the roles and responsibilities of becoming a parent.</p> <p>Areas of consideration include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Determining whether having and raising a child fits with the parents' desired lifestyle.2. Recognizing any expectations that a parent might have of a child.3. Considering potential parents' present ability to love and nurture a child.4. Contemplating any lifestyle choices necessary to allow either parent, ideally the mother, to remain with the child for the first one to three years.5. Conceiving a baby with loving intention and full awareness.6. Considering the long-term implications and potential risks of any artificial measures (such as sperm and egg donation, surrogacy, or fertility drugs) when natural conception and gestation are not possible.
B. Fostering an Optimal Womb Environment	<p>B. A child who is nurtured in the womb of a healthy, loving, and tranquil mother receives the best possible start in life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The unborn child is a sensitive being aware of, and responsive to, the mother's feelings and experiences.• A growing life is strongly influenced by the mother's physical, mental, and emotional well-being, as well as the quality of support she receives throughout pregnancy.	<p>B. Honor pregnancy as a natural event (not a medical condition) and recognize the importance of the mother's emotional, mental, and physical well-being; a safe environment; and a strong support system.</p> <p>Fundamentals include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Active involvement of the father as a vital partner during pregnancy and childbirth preparation, including parental consensus and consistency in parenting values and practices.2. Access to physical, emotional, and spiritual support from empathetic family, friends, and community.3. Supportive, sincere, and caring partnerships with prenatal care providers, including access to a midwifery model of care and information about potential risks and benefits of medical procedures (e.g., ultrasound, amniocentesis, or extended bed rest).4. Preparation for pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and the postpartum period by access to a comprehensive range of educational and supportive resources and services.5. A nutritionally balanced diet supplemented with prenatal vitamins and minerals.

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C. Preparing for an Optimal Birth Experience	C. A natural birth affords significant benefits to mother and baby; therefore, both the potential benefits and risks of any intervention warrant careful consideration.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Activities that promote emotional and mental well-being and strengthen and tone the body, such as walking, prenatal exercise, yoga, tai chi, singing, meditation, and focusing on positive stories about natural, healthy birth. 7. A lifestyle free from toxic substances (including tobacco, alcohol, over-the-counter medications, nonessential prescriptions, and other drugs). 8. A nontoxic environment, avoiding unsafe levels of air, noise and light pollution, unsafe tap water, chemical hair and skin products, and chemical cleaning agents. 9. Education and preparation for childbirth, breastfeeding, newborn parenting, sibling readiness, and development of parental consensus and consistency in parenting values and practices. 10. Communication with the unborn child through touch, music, singing, and vivid, detailed visualization of the pregnancy, birth, and life you desire with your new child.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A natural birth is more likely to occur in an environment based on the midwifery model of care, with physical and emotional support, nourishment, freedom of movement, and individualized attention. • The possible benefits of any contemplated test, procedure, drug, or surgery must be weighed against the immediate and long-term risks according to current scientific evidence. 	<p>C. Consider all birthplace options, recognizing that birth experiences are enhanced in home, birth center, or hospital settings that support parents' informed choices for the labor, birthing, and postpartum process (Coalition for Improving Maternity Services, www.motherfriendly.org).</p> <p>Birth experiences are enhanced by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unrestricted access to the birth companions of a woman's choice, including father, partner, children, family members, and friends. 2. Unrestricted access to continuous emotional and physical support from a skilled woman—for example, a doula or labor-support professional. 3. Access to professional midwifery care. 4. Availability of accurate descriptive and statistical information about birth practices and procedures for birth care, including interventions and outcomes. 5. Culturally competent care that is sensitive and responsive to the specific beliefs, values, and customs of the mother's ethnicity and religion. 6. Freedom for the birthing woman to walk, move about, and assume the positions of her choice during labor and birth (unless restriction is specifically required to correct a complication).

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		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Selection of a birthing facility that follows clearly defined policies and procedures for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collaborating and consulting with other maternity services, including communication with the original caregiver when transfer to another birth site is necessary; b. Linking the mother and baby to appropriate community resources, including prenatal and postdischarge follow-up and breastfeeding support. 8. A birthing facility that does not <i>routinely</i> employ practices and procedures that are not supported by scientific evidence, including (but not limited to) shaving, enemas, routine IVs, withholding nourishment or water, early rupture of membranes, electronic fetal monitoring, induction, augmentation, episiotomies, and cesarean births. 9. The use of relaxation practices and noninvasive labor aids, such as breathing techniques, warm water baths, massage, music, acupuncture, and aromatherapy as alternatives to the use of painkillers or anesthetic drugs, unless specifically required to correct a complication. 10. A birth plan that details the informed choices of parents for their labor, birth, and postpartum experience; caregivers who agree to support the plan; and a contingency plan for parents' active involvement in decisions to use technology or any deviation from their birth plan.
D. Supporting Early Postpartum Attachment	<p>D. Every child needs to be securely bonded with at least one other person—optimally, the mother.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The infant-mother bond is primary and lays the foundation for all future relationships. • Securing and maintaining a strong bond is the foundation of a parent's effectiveness and the key to a child's optimal development. 	<p>D. Select a birthing environment that clearly supports the infant-parent attachment process.</p> <p>This environment offers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respect for the interdependence of the infant-mother unit, supporting immediate and uninterrupted contact with mother and infant remaining together 24 hours a day (rooming in). 2. Respect for the significance of the father's or partner's role in supporting the mother and connecting with the child during the birth and postpartum period. 3. Support for mothers and families, including those with premature newborn or sick infants, to touch, hold, breastfeed, and care for their babies to the extent compatible with their condition. 4. Help for mothers to initiate breastfeeding within an hour of birth and to maintain lactation even if they are separated from their infants.

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E. Protecting the Vulnerable Infant-Parent Bond	E ₁ . Breastfeeding, continual physical contact, and being carried on the body are necessary for optimal immune system and brain development and promote the long-term health of the baby <i>and</i> mother.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Support for successful breastfeeding by responding to the baby's cues to nurse and by giving no artificial teats, pacifiers, food, or drink other than breast milk, unless medically indicated. 6. Assistance for mothers to establish breastfeeding support groups and referral of new mothers to them. 7. Respect for the baby's attachment-promoting behaviors by not interfering with suckling, eye contact, body molding, etc., immediately following birth. 8. Respect for infants by telling them what is happening in their environment and what is going to be happening to them. 9. Protection from overstimulation (bright lights or loud noises) or trauma to the infant (separation from mother, taking blood specimens, or infant circumcision). 10. Assistance to parents in planning for help with meals, childcare, housework, etc., during the postpartum period.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneous breastfeeding for a minimum of two years provides optimal nutrition and bonding. • Carrying in-arms or wearing the baby in a sling throughout the day provides the near-constant movement that optimizes brain development as well as the touch, safety, and comfort essential to secure bonding. <p>E₂. A father's consistent, meaningful, and loving presence in a child's life is significant to the child, father, mother, and the well-being of the family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The father's role begins with preparation for conception and continues with the physical and emotional protection and support of the mother, baby, and mother-child bond. 	<p>E₁ & 2. Support secure infant-parent bonding through the early days, weeks, and months by respecting attachment-promoting behaviors.</p> <p>Support for infant-parent bonding includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Valuing the father's/partner's role as protector of mother and infant and involving the partner in early bonding and the baby's care. 2. Breastfeeding by responding to the baby's cues, exclusively for six months, and sustained for the World Health Organization's recommendation of 2+ years and for as long as both mother and child are benefiting and comfortable. 3. Avoiding the use of substitutes for human contact—strollers, portable baby seats, cribs, pacifiers, bottles, and stuffed toys. 4. Maintaining skin-to-skin contact, smiling, making prolonged and steady eye contact, stroking the baby, and making soothing sounds. 5. Carrying infants in-arms or wearing them in slings (except when they want to creep, crawl, or walk on their own), which is essential for vestibular (inner ear) stimulation and optimal development of the central nervous system. 6. Providing safe, shared, and accessible sleeping arrangements (e.g., a family bed or cosleeper).

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the absence of the biological father, a child needs a bonded, ongoing relationship with a loving male caregiver. <p>E₃. Single parents have a special need for a strong emotional and financial support system to effectively nurture their children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respecting and supporting a child's healthy relationship with <i>each</i> parent is essential to the child's self-confidence and self-value. A support system that includes healthy-functioning adults of both genders and multiple generations provides balanced nurturing and role modeling. 	<p>7. Recognizing that the baby is a social being, whose behaviors are not "manipulations" but communications of their valid needs.</p> <p>E₃. Assist in building additional support for the single parent. Potential support includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a network of both genders that may include biological family, family-of-choice, or parent support groups. Finding ways that an absent parent can maintain a consistent and meaningful presence in a child's life (e.g., letters, photos, phone calls, etc.) when a parent cannot be physically present. Helping navigate a single parent through the complex social services system when financial resources are not readily accessible.
F. Honoring and Respecting the Child's Intrinsic Nature	<p>F₁. All children are by nature social beings, born with the drive to play, learn, cooperate with others, and contribute to their world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are more able to reach their full potential when treated with respect within a loving environment that meets their emotional and physical needs and encourages and supports innate curiosity and spontaneous learning. Flexibility, clear thinking, age-appropriate problem solving, and intuition are optimized in a child-led learning environment that offers clear, consistent boundaries along with creative, cooperative activities, interaction with nature, unstructured play, and time to simply <i>be</i>. <p>F₂ Each child carries a pattern of development designed to unfold at a unique rhythm and pace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every child deserves trust and respect for her or his own emerging learning styles and abilities. 	<p>F_{1 & 2}. Recognize and nourish every child's innate goodness and wholeness of spirit, innate motivation to learn, and unique rhythm of development.</p> <p>Recognition and nourishment includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding that those who perceive a child's pattern of development are better able to nurture a child in harmony with this pattern. Minimizing structured academic education before age 7 years. Recognizing and supporting multiple types of intelligence (e.g., kinesthetic, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, or logical-mathematical). Offering access to resources and support for artistic expression. Allowing time for unstructured play—alone and with parents, caregivers, and other children. Minimizing the use of rewards and punishments either to reinforce desired behaviors or motivate children to learn. Validating and acknowledging children through words and actions, and being respectful of the child's saying (or indicating), "No" or "I'm not ready." Being calm, respectful, and present with children when they are discharging stress, hurt, and trauma.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents who perceive their child's pattern of development are better able to nurture their child in harmony with this pattern. 	9. Adopting a learning philosophy that is responsive to the child's interest and abilities.
G. Identifying and Meeting the Child's Innate Needs	<p>G₁. All children are born with inherent physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs that, when met, foster optimal human development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional needs for unconditional love, touch, and attention are as valid as physical needs. Responding to crying rather than leaving children alone to "cry it out" shows them their needs are acknowledged and deepens their basic trust. <p>G₂ Young children communicate their needs through behavior that is strongly influenced by innate temperament, early experiences, behavior modeled by others, and current circumstances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children naturally imitate those around them. When adults discover what a child's behavior is actually communicating, they are better able to respond to the <i>need</i> rather than react to the behavior. <p>G₃. Children depend upon their parents and caregivers to keep them safe and to protect them from emotional and physical neglect, violence, and other toxic conditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence, such as infant circumcision, spanking, routine circumcision, 	<p>G₁ & 2. Create environments that meet children's innate needs for caregiver constancy, unconditional love, and security.</p> <p>Innate needs are met by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Caregiver constancy (i.e., one or two caregivers, ideally the parents) for the first three years—avoiding frequent or prolonged separation. Unconditional love that emerges from the recognition of each child's innate goodness. Consistent, reasonable, and respectful limits. Parenting that recognizes uncooperative behavior as an expression of unmet needs (e.g., sleep, respect, attention, good nutrition, exercise, or discharge of pent-up emotions). Parenting that recognizes disruptive behaviors as an expression of unmet needs and responds creatively and compassionately to the underlying needs and feelings, turning the situation into a game ("let's pretend"), redirecting or offering choices ("you can do this" instead of "don't do that"), or replaying ("let's start over"). A healthy, nutritious diet of whole foods, avoiding refined sugars, processed foods, additives, and pesticides. Access to violence-free, gender-balanced multicultural media and experiences with others. Access to safe outdoor play with abundant opportunities for spontaneous movement and exercise. The communication of healthy, responsible values about the body and sexuality, including respect for the right of infants and children to explore their bodies in healthy ways. <p>G₃. Protect children from harmful environments.</p> <p>Protecting young children includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Protection from exposure to loud noises, bright lights, toxic substances, passive smoke, and household chemicals. Minimal exposure to TV, video games, computer programs, and other electronic media, with careful monitoring of content.

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	<p>shaming, and emotional and sexual abuse weakens or impairs children's sense of wholeness, trust, and security.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toxic influences that damage children's brains and nervous systems include overstimulation from video games, computers, and television, as well as environmental contaminants and behavior-modifying drugs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Permission to refuse touch, even from relatives, and the right to private time. 4. Protection from physical or emotional violence (e.g., caregiver anxiety/conflict, spanking, verbal abuse, shaming, "time out," or any other form of isolation). 5. Recognition of the need for the child's immune system to mature when considering the benefits and short- and long-term risks of vaccinations, especially live vaccines and those given at birth or before the baby is 2 years old.
H. Healing Trauma and Dysfunctional Patterns that Diminish Caregiver Effectiveness	<p>H. The ability of parents and caregivers to nurture children is strongly influenced by their own birth, childhood, and life experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The more adults understand and compensate for their own unmet physical and emotional childhood needs, the better able they are to meet the needs of children in their care. • Parents who lacked adequate information, resources, or support during the earlier stages of their children's development can partially compensate for unmet needs once they are better informed. 	<p>H. Minimize our own barriers to nurturing children as parents, caregivers, and a society.</p> <p>Minimizing our barriers includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognizing that our ancestral and family patterns, as well as our conception, prenatal, birth, childhood, and life experiences impact the ways we welcome and care for our children. 2. Addressing dysfunctional patterns caused by our own early unmet needs and recognizing the need for positive role models and caring and supportive community. 3. Recognizing and tending to a mother's need to heal any stressful experiences that occurred while pregnant or during the birth or early childhood of her offspring. 4. Strengthening a child's attachment, if circumstances interfered with early bonding, by holding, soothing, carrying, playing, massaging, and attending to that child's signals for the need for quiet reflection.
I. Fostering Attitudes and Behaviors that Promote a Child's Contributing to Society	<p>I. When children live in socially responsive families and communities, they receive a foundation for becoming socially responsible themselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children learn to respect and respond to the needs of others when they are seen and heard and their opinions and needs are recognized, respected, and met. • Engaging children in age-appropriate, creative, and compassionate problem solving and decision-making within the family and the community fosters responsible members of a society. 	<p>I. Foster citizenship development in children.</p> <p>Citizenship can be fostered by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A harmonious family environment that practices creative and constructive problem solving. 2. Age-appropriate opportunities to practice problem solving and decision-making. 3. Opportunities to contribute and be of service to others. 4. Support for cooperative rather than competitive activities. 5. Access to, and age-appropriate responsibility for, pets, plants, etc. 6. Encouraging community involvement by providing children with opportunities to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Welcome a new neighbor with flowers, songs, cookies, an invitation to tea. b. Take homemade soup to a sick friend. c. Help with the school bake sale or other fund-raising

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		event. d. Visit or volunteer at a local organization, such as a humane society. e. Visit a retirement home during holidays, etc.
J. Providing Access to Parent Education and Support	<p>J. Effective parenting is an art that can be learned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about children's developmental stages, temperament, and individuality will help parents make informed decisions and serve as advocates of the child's well-being. • Ready access to evidence-linked information about optimal human development is vital for societies that have departed from nature's biological imperatives. 	<p>J. Provide ready access to education and support for parenting.</p> <p>Parent education programs include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information about children's nature, needs, developmental stages, temperament, and individuality. 2. The resources and encouragement to enable parents to make informed decisions and to advocate for their child's medical care, wellness, education, and safety. 3. School programs that promote awareness of the roles and responsibilities of mothers, fathers, siblings, and communities in fulfilling the needs of a child. 4. Preparation of prospective and expectant parents, ensuring that they are prepared to assume the roles and responsibilities of becoming mothers and fathers. 5. Attachment-promoting parenting classes and support groups.
K. Advocating Family-Friendly Work Practices and Social Policies	<p>K. Political, economic, and social structures either enhance or diminish parents' opportunities to nurture and sustain a secure bond with their children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support of the immediate community and society at large is crucial if parents are to maintain a secure bond with their children in a nuclear family structure. • Society benefits and families thrive when health care and sociopolitical structures support all families in preparing for optimal gestation, birth, and parenting. 	<p>K. Develop family-friendly economic, political, and social structures that clearly support young families.</p> <p>Support structures include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paid maternity and paternity leave (including adoptive and foster parents) <i>and</i> reduction in mother's workload without penalty. 2. A minimum wage sufficient to allow each parent to work a maximum of one fulltime job outside the home. 3. Flextime, part-time and job-sharing positions in the workplace with paid time to care for a child's illness and provision to attend children's shows and sports events, and to volunteer at school. 4. The welcoming of children in or near the workplace. 5. Family schedules that accommodate at least one family meal each day, unstructured time with children undisturbed by work, phone, email, faxes, and voicemail. 6. Cooperative baby-sitting within communities, with the option of exchanging time instead of money.

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		<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Synchronization of school vacation schedules so that extended family and friends can holiday together.8. Health-care coverage that promotes wellness as well as access to, and coverage for, a wide variety of conventional and alternative medical treatments.9. Health policies that accommodate and encourage informed consent as well as informed refusal for treatment.10. Family-friendly community environments that welcome children and encourage family activities.