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Foreword

Many books have been published (ours included) on the subject of attachment parenting. Each one, as it is released and read and practiced, moves the next one forward a notch, or even a few notches. *Attached at the Heart* takes a giant step in moving forward this critical concept: to parent our children well, we need principles, and we need reasons for those principles. Eight such principles are offered in this book.

This will be an ongoing conversation, because even this book will be better once the concept it defines, using these eight principles, is practiced by more and more parents. The principles will become more compelling; anything that could be added, as we get more practice, will most likely fit into one of these well-thought-out and well-stated principles.

When we stumbled onto a reason to get serious about the way we were being called and stretched beyond the neighborhood parenting norm, we knew we would have to write a book- we got creative with the way we responded to our fourth child's temperament. (You know that story if you've read our first book, *Creative Parenting*, from 1981, or *Nighttime Parenting*, from 1985, or a couple of our more recent books in the Sears Parenting Library, including *The Baby Book*). "Immersion mothering" and "involved fathering" morphed into "attachment parenting" and the 7 Baby Bs. All of this happened in the context of our research laboratory—our own (eventually) eight children and a thriving but focused pediatric practice, where we did a lot of note taking. Those notes wound up in one book after another, and many of you reading this right now contributed, because you came into our office or talked with us on the phone and told us what worked for your babies and children.

We ask that you pay attention to and heed well this "call to arms" you see so strongly set forth in *Attached at the Heart* as a sort of parenting "manifesto"—by definition, a public declaration of intentions, purposes, or motives by an important person or group. This important person or group is you, the individual reader, and the parents in our culture who truly want what's best for our children, and who want to change the way our culture raises the next generation. In the process of responding to this call, we will each make this a better world, one family at a time.

Dr. William and Martha Sears

Preface

If we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to struggle; we won't have to pass fruitless idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which consciously or unconsciously the whole world is hungering.

Mahatma Gandhi

Over fifteen years ago, we hatched our idea to “save the world.” We were and remain hopelessly optimistic (with occasional bouts of despair) that we can effect change in our society. Both of us are parents, with six sons between us, and we both were teachers with experience on the front lines, which gave us the perspective, determination, and passion to begin a grassroots nonprofit organization called **Attachment Parenting International (API)**.

Why did we do it? When we were new mothers, we felt so insecure about our abilities. We just didn't feel knowledgeable or prepared, even though we read just about every book we could get our hands on. We both lived far from other family members, so when we became friends, we glommed onto each other for support. We also found support and education from our local La Leche League group (they teach mothers how to breastfeed).

Our experience with La Leche League prepared us in so many ways and provided us with opportunities to learn from other, more experienced mothers. These experiences gave us confidence and skills to be better mothers. At these monthly meetings, we first learned about attachment parenting and read books by Dr. William and Martha Sears. Their books were like a buoy in the ocean—guiding our way, helping us keep our sanity by giving us reassurance that we were doing the right thing. In time, we learned to trust our own innate wisdom and mothering instincts, which allowed us to connect with our children in ways that we would never have thought possible. Of course, we made

a lot of mistakes along the way ... just ask our sons. But the fact is that we are better for the experience, and our children are better for our experience.

In the early 1990s, we began to read about kids killing kids and kids killing their parents. What in the world was happening to children that would cause them to commit such heinous crimes? Then we read a book called *High Risk: Children without a Conscience* by Ken Magid and Carol McKelvey. This was the first time we learned about Dr. John Bowlby and *attachment theory*, which hypothesized that the lack of emotional connection created all kinds of emotional and social problems, including violence.

The work of Alice Miller awakened our awareness of the influences of culture on the treatment of children. Until we come to terms with how we were treated as children, we will continue to perpetuate the same attitudes and treatment with our own children. The culture in which we live has tremendous power over us, and it takes consistent and conscious effort to go upstream against the current of popular opinions. Dr. Miller has made it her mission to abolish corporal punishment in every country because she believes that will be the only way we can begin to move forward in eliminating violence toward children.

Given all this information and from our own experiences, we knew in our heart of hearts that attachment parenting was the key to creating emotional connection and making families stronger. We believed (and still do) that if parents are given good information about why it is so important to nurture children, the tools to do it, and parent groups that support them in their choices, then we will have a lot of empowered mothers and fathers. Renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt a small group of committed people can change the world; it indeed is the only thing that ever has." Who knows, we parents might just create a paradigm shift in childrearing.

We began going to the library and spending hours, days, months, and years researching and reading articles, books, and magazines from as far back as the 1940s (this was before the Internet was widely used). We called anyone we thought would give us advice or information, and many were more than happy to talk to us. They shared their wisdom and encouraged us all along the way. *Attached at the Heart* is the culmination of over fifteen years of information gathering, investigative

research, and practice. We believe that it is critical for parents to have this information in order to make informed decisions for their children in our increasingly complex society. Until recently, we have heavily relied on and trusted others to know what is best for our children. We can no longer rely on others; we have to educate ourselves and rely on our own knowledge of our children.

Since the early nineties, the world seems to have become worse, not better—even more violent and chaotic. People are looking for answers, for something they can do to change this direction, because we can no longer rely on politics and governments. Many realize that it has to begin with each individual and within each family.

The intent of our book is to give you practical answers to everyday problems and to raise your awareness that you might be more conscious and purposeful in interactions with your children. Unless we understand why we do what we do in regard to children, we will undoubtedly continue the same practices, whether they make sense or not. We will be vulnerable to the advice of others who may say things with authority but without any basis for backing up their advice. This book will give you the evidence you need to feel confident in your decisions.

Attachment parenting is an idea whose time has come. What began at the kitchen table as a simple idea has grown into a worldwide network of parent support groups, a comprehensive support group leader training program, and a new curriculum, and it also serves as a national clearinghouse for parents and professionals. API helps parents with every aspect of parenting, from preconception through the teen years, by providing the latest information and research on parenting practices that strengthen parent-child relationships and families. A nonprofit organization founded in 1994, API offers parents information, education, and support to help them in their parenting journeys and to strengthen their relationships with their children. The basic principles of attachment parenting are a blueprint for change and are discussed in *Attached at the Heart*. Rooted in sound science and common sense, these principles provide a framework of an overarching philosophy—*listen to your baby and trust your instincts!*

We have learned that every family is unique with unique circumstances, that there is no such thing as perfect parents. We always carry with us the legacy of those generations who went before. The

way we were parented and the wounds that we carry inevitably work their way into our interactions with our children, which is why it's so important to consciously work on those issues. As you read our book, please know that the principles are not intended to be standards of perfection but rather to be used as guidelines to help you feel informed, validated, supported, and confident in your childrearing decisions. It's so important to base your daily decisions on what will strengthen your attachment with your baby (or child), given the current circumstances. Ask yourself, "Will this strengthen my connection with my baby?"

If the situation is not ideal but necessary, then ask yourself what you can do to minimize the impact of the situation for your baby and what you can do to reconnect with your baby or young child.

Enjoy your baby, knowing that the love you give will come back to you in more ways than you can imagine for generations to come.

Barbara Nicholson and Lysa Parker