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YOUR KIDS, THEIR LIVES:

A Parent's Guide to Raising Happy, Competent, Caring Children

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**Chapter One**  
**RESTLESS GHOSTS**

*That I be not a restless ghost  
Who haunts your footsteps as they pass  
Beyond the point where you have left  
Me standing in the newsprung grass,*

*You must be free to take a path  
Whose end I feel no need to know,  
No irking fever to be sure  
You went where I would have you go,*

*Those who would fence the future in  
Between two walls of well-laid stones  
But lay a ghost walk for themselves,  
A dreary walk for dusty bones.*

*So you can go without regret  
Away from this familiar land,  
Leaving your kiss upon my hair  
And all the future in your hands.*

Margaret Mead  
*Blackberry Winter*

When noted anthropologist Margaret Mead was 37 she gave birth to her only child, Catherine. Determined that her daughter become a happy, competent and caring adult, Margaret rejected many of the principles and practices of child rearing favored by American pediatricians and parents before the 1950s. She turned instead to her studies of the many cultures she had visited. She looked at the beliefs, discipline practices and child rearing results of parents in tribes throughout the world and adopted the parts of these societies that she thought would best help Catherine enjoy

## *Restless Ghosts*

her childhood and become a well-functioning grownup. "I would have to work hard," she said, "not to overprotect my child, but to ensure my child's freedom to find its own way of taking hold of life and becoming a person."

This is the goal of parenting: *to raise children who can take hold of life and become their own persons.* We bring children into the world and are responsible for their care and well-being, but in the end these children must create lives that will bring them pleasure and satisfaction. They must go into the world prepared to live without us if need be, capable of building lives for themselves filled with good work, good relationships and the capacity to care about others and be an asset to their communities.

Unfortunately, many parents are failing to raise happy, competent and caring children, some because they love so much they can't let go, others because they don't care enough, and many who try their very best but simply don't have the skills needed to accomplish their goals. Here are some disturbing statistics:

- Up to 2.5 percent of children and up to 8.3 percent of adolescents in the United States suffer from depression. The rate of depression among adolescents is similar to that of depression in adults, and may be as high as one in eight. Two-thirds of children with mental health problems do not get the help they need.
- Every day, between 1.3 million and 2.8 million runaway and homeless youth live on the streets of America. One out of every seven children will run away from home before the age of 18.

## *Your Kids, Their Lives*

- There are 3 million reports of child abuse or neglect in America each year. Three children die every day due to abuse or neglect. 13 percent of violence in society can be linked to earlier child maltreatment.
- An estimated one in five teenagers are current alcohol drinkers and 1 in 13 teenagers are binge alcohol drinkers.
- An estimated 1.1 million children ages 12–17 meet the diagnostic criteria for dependence on illicit drugs.
- The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate of any developed country. By age 18, one in four young women will become pregnant. This is twice as high as England, France, and Canada; three times as high as Sweden; and four times as high as the Netherlands.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15 to 24 year olds. The rate has tripled since 1960. It is the fourth leading cause of death for children between the ages of 10 and 14.
- Homicide is the second leading cause of death for persons 15–24 years of age and is the leading cause of death for African-American and Hispanic youths in this age-group.
- More than 2 million Americans are in prison, an astonishing 715 per 100,000 citizens, the highest rate among the Western nations. More than a third of women in the nation's prisons and jails reported abuse as children, compared with 12 percent to 17 percent for women in the general population. About 14 percent of male inmates reported abuse as children, compared with 5 percent to 8 percent of men in the general population.

## Restless Ghosts

- It is estimated that one in every four children in the United States (28 million) is living in a household with an alcoholic adult.

It is not difficult to see the results of good parenting; happy children are contented and cheerful. Pleased with their lives, they are open and optimistic as they face each day. Their joyousness makes them pleasant to be around. Competent children have skills. They are masterful when it comes to learning necessary tasks such as speaking and reading, and they show competence in things they find enjoyable, be it building Web sites on their computers, fishing, playing the violin, cooking, shooting hoops or doing the hula dance. Children who are caring show concern for others. They are thoughtful and kind and conduct their lives with dignity and grace.

As a parent you must construct a solid foundation for your children, one built on your ability to learn and change as your children grow. You do not want to be a restless ghost blocking your children's path, but rather the person who gives them the tools they need to create happy, competent and caring lives—and then turn them loose to live them.

*President Harry Truman, when asked to reveal his secret of parenting success said, "I have found the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it." As it turned out, his daughter Margaret did quite well by this method. She grew into an intelligent and talented young woman.*