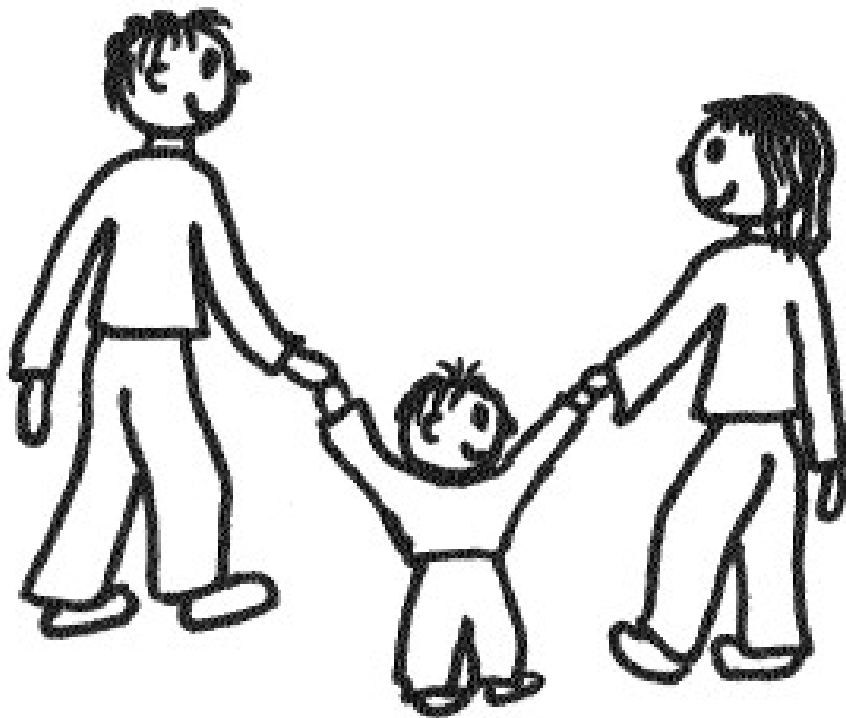


What you really need

(True love is possible 1)

**Everyday stories
about the relationship method
'Natural accompaniment'**

For parents and children



Daniela Bissig-Bestgen

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If, like a young plant, you neither ‘over-fertilise’ your child with consumer goods, nor ‘suffocate’ it under your expectations, nor ‘scorch’ it with excessive attention, nor let it ‘dry up’ due to lack of time, but also do not ‘drown’ it in a well-meaning way or constantly ‘repot’ it arbitrarily, but simply, like an organic gardener, *casually* fulfil its completely natural and species-specific needs so that it can gradually develop into full bloom, you will automatically be raising it in a ‘species-appropriate’ way!

This doesn't mean that you do what your child wants all the time, but it does mean that you always offer them a supportive everyday framework that will do them (and you) good in the long term. Only this is *true love*!

Real enthusiasm: "Mummy, mummy!" four-year-old Ivan gushes as his mother Eva enters the flat. "Look what we've been doing this afternoon, Daddy and I! We've been running the CD player the whole time so it records everything we say.

At first, we just said something that came to our minds. And then we sang all sorts of songs - even the song about the cuckoo clock that Daddy can sing so well.

And then we messed around a little bit, but all of a sudden, Papi made up a story all by himself, the story of the little gugelmotz getting lost in the woods. That was dangerous, Mummy! And the little gugelmotz had to cry, he was so scared. But thankfully, in the end, everything came out okay.

You can listen to it afterwards - like on a real CD!

But we also played drums, with the cooking pots on the upturned pans and lids - sometimes very loudly, then very quietly. We recorded that, too, Mummy. And we tooted in a tube. It sounded like a trumpet, really!

But after that, we both came up with nothing but rubbish, but we still didn't switch off the CD player and continued to record everything. We almost wet our pants with laughter, we made so much nonsense! You can't imagine how funny it was, Mummy!

Come on, you have to listen to it now...!"

Small change - big effect: "Why don't you play with the doll's house or the cars until I've done the housework," Rita tries to motivate her one-and-a-half-year-old Tim again today after breakfast, but nothing has been able to excite him for days. Meanwhile, there are no other children in the house to play with in the mornings, as the neighbour's girl has recently started kindergarten and the twins on the top floor are in the crèche.

Slowly, however, Rita gets so fed up with her little one's listless whining that she has to hold herself back from shouting angrily at him. Just as Tim is about to start crying again, she suddenly has an idea:

"Would you like to look at a picture book with me *right now*, even though I haven't even cleared the kitchen table and the beds haven't been made yet?"

Surprised, Tim pauses and nods delightedly. He picks up his favourite book as quickly as his little legs can carry him and Rita sits down with him on the dishevelled marital bed, where she tells him the story of the street cleaner Nino for the umpteenth time - this time just so early in the day.

At the end, Tim closes the book himself, beaming with joy, and says quite understanding: "Mummy work, Tim playing car. Make long, long column!"

And really! While Rita does the housework, he plays peacefully for a whole hour until it's time to go shopping. But the rest of the day is also surprisingly

positive this time because the little one doesn't even think about complaining anymore.

From then on, the morning story becomes a much-loved daily ritual for a long time, and for Tim life is suddenly as exciting and wonderful as it used to be - just because his mum has finally realised what he had apparently been missing for his happiness: a bit of mummy's closeness and affection as a 'jump-start' and 'stable ground' for the new day...!

Relapse: Lena is two and a half years old and hasn't needed nappies for a long time. She is also very understanding in other respects, has given up her dummy, and wants to be a big, good girl.

But one day everything changes:

Lena has laid down on her half-year-old brother Ricco's mat on the floor in the nursery, who is currently sleeping in his cot in the next room and is making whiny baby noises.

When her mother Erika comes walking through the hallway with the laundry basket under her arm and quickly checks that everything is all right with the two older children, she pauses in amazement. She quickly puts the laundry down and bends over her little girl, who is clearly in need of help.

"What's wrong, Lena? Are you hurt?" she enquires anxiously. She also looks questioningly at her older brother, who is playing peacefully with the Legos in the corner. But he just shrugs his shoulders and has no idea what could be wrong with his little sister.

Then the little girl herself indicates that she can no longer speak, takes her little brother's dummy, which is lying around, into her mouth, and then makes another whining, help-seeking sound while she stretches her arms out to her mother as if she were a little baby who desperately wants to be picked up.

At first, Erika is completely perplexed, but then it dawns on her that Lena must have been jealous of her little brother for some time, although she has *never* shown it.

Ricco naturally attracted a lot of attention from the moment he was born, because he still had to be changed, nursed, and carried around all the time, while Lena could almost be overlooked, as quiet, easy to care for, and peaceful as she was.

'My little girl seems to have missed out completely, but without putting up a fight, as other children would do loudly or aggressively when they are jealous of their sibling,' thinks the mother, concerned.

'But for Lena, such behaviour was probably out of the question, because she really liked her little brother, and screaming around would not have suited her character at all.

But now she obviously also wanted to be treated like a baby in order to finally receive enough attention. Logical, really...'

Smiling, Erika now strokes her daughter's fine, curly hair lovingly and says reassuringly and comfortingly:

"No, no, my little baby doesn't have to cry, Mummy's here. And you already have a dummy in your mouth like a baby. Mmmh delicious, isn't it?

Would you like to be picked up, yes? So come on, my baby! I'll carry you around the flat a bit like I always do with Ricco. Do you like that?"

Lena beams all over her face and nods eagerly, but without saying a single word. She is visibly pleased that Erika has understood where her problem lies. Confidently, she places her fuzzy head on her mother's neck and listens to the soft song she sings to her as she wanders around.

When Erika later fetches a bottle for the little one in the kitchen and fills it with water, she almost whoops with joy, but doesn't for a second abandon her role as a baby who can't yet speak. Without resistance, she then lets her mother lay her back down on Ricco's mat in the nursery and begins to suck the bottle empty with relish as if it contained the sweetest drink in the world.

"When you're finished, I'll give you nappies to pee in,' says Erika to her new, big baby. "Would you like to?"

Of course, she doesn't have to ask twice, because Lena almost lights up, she is so excited about the idea. So, Erika takes out a few large paper nappies that she has put aside and starts changing Lena right there on the mat.

She casually explains to her eldest, who looks on with wide eyes as if it were the most normal thing in the world:

"You know, Ralph, we have *two* babies now: Ricco *and* Lena! I think Lena just needs this for a while so she doesn't have to be so jealous.

And what about you? Would you like to wear nappies like these two again?"

The almost five-year-old replies indignantly:

"Of course not! I'm not a baby anymore!"

"But maybe you'd like a bottle..." the mother follows up because she doesn't want her big boy to feel left behind just because he's a bit older.

The boy is obviously struggling with himself, as he would love to drink from the bottle again like he used to, but he can't admit that...

Since Erika can see that her little son would enjoy this part of baby play at least as much as Lena, she quickly brings him a small plastic bottle filled with water.

"So, now all our babies are well again!" Erika smiles and hurries into the kitchen to start preparing the vegetables for lunch before Ricco wakes up and needs to be fed...

Half an hour later, she sits at the kitchen table with Ricco on her lap and slowly spoons the vegetables she has cooked into porridge into his mouth. She sat Lena next to her in the old toddler's highchair as she used to do and tied a bib around her, although this would hardly have been necessary for her.

"You see, Lena, it won't be long now and you'll also have baby porridge as delicious as Ricco's," the mum chats to the little one so she has the patience to wait a little longer until her little brother has finished. The time has finally come! As Ricco rocks contentedly in his 'baby bouncer' 'lie' near the kitchen table, it's Lena's turn. The little girl really enjoys the fact that she can now sit on her mummy's lap like a baby and have every spoonful brought to her mouth. She doesn't like the lukewarm vegetables as much as she used to, but she swallows them bravely because she wants everything to be just like her little brother.

After feeding the two 'babies', Erika carries Lena and then Ricco into the next room to change them both on the breastfeeding mattress on the floor. Here, neither of the children can fall off or hurt themselves in any other way - and besides, the changing table would have been too short for Lena anyway. Little Ricco even seems to enjoy the fact that his big sister is being changed next to him today because he laughs all over his face at Lena and stretches out his little hands towards her.

"You haven't wet your nappy at all," Erika marvels as she 'unwraps' Lena. Lena grimaces apologetically because as a baby she 'can't' answer. But suddenly the mother realises that her big girl probably doesn't find the wet feeling in her trousers as pleasant as she used to and has therefore been frantically holding everything back...

"Just go to the toilet quickly, Lena," she suggests, "and then come back so I can put your dry nappy on again." The little one immediately agrees to this solution and scampers off, even though she couldn't actually 'walk' as a baby, but doesn't care at the moment. If only she could keep wearing nappies like Ricco!

After Erika has finished changing both children, she carries the babies one after the other into the nursery, where they can play together lying on the floor, while in her field of vision, the parents and Ralph now eat lunch at the kitchen table as usual - apart from the fact that the boy has a bottle next to his plate instead of a glass.

"What's happened to you?" enquires dad Silvio, confused. "You're drinking from the bottle again, Ralph? And Lena is over there lying on the floor like a baby with Ricco instead of eating with us here? Have I missed something?"

Erika readily tells her husband that they won't just have *one* baby in the near future, but *two and a half* - because the older two children have probably been a bit neglected in the last few months due to all the breastfeeding of the little one.

"But you can't do that, Erika!" says Silvio, horrified. "You already have more than enough work since the au pair went home after six months. You can't need any more babies!"

"That's what I thought at first," Erika explains to her husband, shrugging her shoulders, "but I can tell that it's extremely important for Lena that I respond to her excessive need for attention and 'being allowed to be a baby' for a while - otherwise I don't see the future for her. I don't want her to never speak to us again, to stop eating, and to withdraw into herself in a huff because she thinks everyone is only interested in Ricco and not in her. Given her quiet nature, that would be quite possible..."

Ralph, on the other hand, only plays this baby game for fun, doesn't he?" He nods with a grin and theatrically puts his bottle to his lips to drink orange juice this time.

"Well then," the father admits defeat and finally starts to eat, "if you say so! So today I'll just play 'Hop, Hop, Rider' with three babies instead of one baby and two big kids."

"Oh yes, Daddy!" Ralph exclaims immediately. "And then I have to show you my Lego castle that I built myself - without a model! Lena, on the other hand, can only shake her baby rattle and babble to herself like Ricco at the moment..."

"But how are you going to manage to get to the playground this afternoon with three babies?" Silvio suddenly wants to know and lowers his knife and fork. "Lena 'can't' walk herself. And what about you, Ralph?"

"I've got my bike!" the boy declares firmly. "I'm only playing the baby game in here where nobody can see it. At least I can drink from my old bottle again."

And Erika adds with a smile:

"I thought it would be best to get the extra pushchair seat out of the cellar that we bought for Ralph when Lena was born. That way, our little girl can ride piggyback on the front of the pram and Ricco can still see out of his pram behind her if I put the backrest at an angle."

"Yes, that could work," Silvio considers. "I just hope you can get through it all, my darling, without collapsing any time soon."

"Don't worry, Silvio!" Erika fights back. "I already know what I'm getting myself into. I'm sure I'll be able to pull it off for a while. You just shouldn't expect our flat to look like a furniture brochure any time soon. But it hardly ever does anyway...!"

As a result, over the next few days, Erika does everything she did for Ricco twice: she changes her two babies at least ten times a day, feeds them like twins, and carries them one after the other around the flat or down to the pram, which is parked in the entrance area of the block of flats.

In the shops in the village, people have already got used to Ricco sitting in the front child seat of the shopping trolley and Lena sitting between the goods. And the shop assistants always ask how mummy's new baby Lena is doing today...

Of course, Erika doesn't really need any more work than she already has to do in a household with three small children. But as she realises that this is the only way she can really help her daughter at the moment, she accepts the extra stress with a grin.

After just over a week, however, she is no longer quite so sure whether she hasn't taken on this task. Just as she decides to talk to Silvio about it again in the evening and look for another, less labour-intensive solution, Lena suddenly jumps out at her through the corridor and calls out cheerfully:

"Look, mummy! I don't need nappies anymore. I'm big again now."

With these words, finally spoken by herself again, she pushes down her tights, rips the nappy off her bottom, and holds it out to Erika, beaming.

"You can have them. And the dummy too!"

The spell is broken. From that day onwards, Lena eats independently again as before, eating everything that 'the grown-ups' put on the table - no more lukewarm vegetable porridge for babies. Yikes!

The only thing she and Ralph have reserved for a few more weeks is the bottle, simply because it's so enjoyable to suck on.

However, as a rather quiet child, Lena also has a lot of fun running around the whole flat, going shopping on foot or her wooden balance bike, exercising on the climbing tower in the playground, and hurtling down the big slide - which of course only 'big' children can do! And she's obviously really enjoying finally being able to speak normally again and chat with everyone.

Meanwhile, Erika told Lena that they call it 'jealousy' that drove her to want to be a little baby again, and that many other children are 'jealous' and angry at their little siblings because the little things need so much time at the beginning.

This made a big impression on the little girl. She is now interested and wants to know everything about this topic.

"Is it bad if I'm so jealous that I sometimes wish Ricco didn't exist - but only sometimes...?" asks Lena, for example, or: "Have you ever been jealous of someone, Mummy?" or "Why am I never jealous of Ralph, but I am of Ricco?" etc.

In this way, the word 'jealous' has become her favourite word of late, and many of her thoughts revolve around this new topic, even though she is only two and a half years old.

As Lena once again sits on her mother's lap, thinking about her feelings of jealousy and constantly wrapping a curl around her own finger, she suddenly finds herself completely convinced:

"I'm actually glad that I'm not as small as Ricco anymore. Otherwise, I'd have to sleep back in the baby room and wouldn't be able to talk to you about things like this, Mummy... "

Anticipating needs: "I beg your pardon? You're taking your children to do the weekly groceries?" Ernst turns to his work colleague Max in horror as the two of them make a pilgrimage to the coffee machine during the break.

"Why not?" he replies calmly. "Our children are also part of the family and they clearly enjoy being allowed to come along. Maybe that's because we, the parents, always make sure that everyone feels comfortable.

Our littlest one, Thomas, would be totally overwhelmed if he had to walk all the way through the shops on his own little legs. So, it's a great joy for him to simply be allowed to go everywhere in the child seat of the shopping trolley. And when my wife Gitta or I also play 'racing car' with him from time to time - that means driving a few metres faster than normal when there are no people around - or when we take turns quietly singing 'choo-choo, the railway is coming' and pushing him around between the racks like a locomotive, he is completely happy and usually beaming all over his face.

The two older ones, Moni and Achim, on the other hand, proudly help to find and collect the groceries on Gitta's shopping list, even though the two of them only go to 'small' and 'large' kindergarten. But they already know their way around the lower levels of the racks and know exactly where to find what. And when, for once, they are allowed to put their favourite food in the trolley, they are of course very enthusiastic about their helping job! But sometimes they just want to marvel at the toys in the children's department on their own. Since they have learnt from us from an early age not to violate other people's territorial boundaries, we parents can easily trust them not to touch the objects on display or at most to touch them carefully to take a closer look.

They then stand together for at least three quarters of an hour in front of the tempting shopping racks and think intently about what they want for their next birthday or what they can buy for themselves in a few weeks' time with the mini allowance they have saved.

Of course, in the beginning, there was sometimes a loud cry from every child when shopping, because they had too little money for something. But then they soon realised that although we are extremely kind, funny parents, we are also terribly *consistent*, making it impossible to persuade us to hand over an undeserved five. And then they wisely switched from annoying begging to having peaceful fun while shopping..."

"Well, if that's how you see it," says Ernst, a little confused, thinking about the theatre his little nieces and nephews put on every time his sister takes them to the shopping centre...

"So that our children can really remember such a shopping trip as a pleasant experience," Max continues eagerly, as the two colleagues now sit down at a free table with their coffee cups in hand, 'we deliberately avoid our tired phases when we go shopping. In other words, we choose a period of time in which we are all - including us parents - fully receptive and resilient.

For example, we would *never* go shopping *just before or after* lunch. The morning between 9 and 11 a.m. or the afternoon between 3 and 5 p.m. is much more suitable.

But we also enjoyed the evening sale together after dinner from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm, because at this time of night, children are usually naturally adventurous and in good spirits for a while before heading home and off to bed.

But as I said, something like this only works if the *natural needs* of the youngest to the oldest are taken into account in passing or have already been planned into the process in advance."

"But that sounds pretty complicated!" Ernst is still quite sceptical. "It's as if you have to spend hours filling out and ticking off planning lists like here in the shop before you can finally go shopping..."

"I say! " Max waves it off with a laugh. "It's just a few little things you should think about before you set off:

For example, everyone must have been to the toilet or have had a fresh nappy change, no one must be too tired, everyone must be able to do something they enjoy there, and most importantly – no one should be hungry!

It is absolutely not advisable to go shopping on an *empty* stomach, because when hungry, *everyone* quickly becomes impatient or buys more than they need.

And *every* child in this state starts to whinge or argue with their siblings - simply because they are no longer feeling well and are unconsciously calling for help.

It's not for nothing that so many children are crying in the shops these days and angry, annoyed parents are shouting at the top of their voices and going berserk over every little thing. But that wouldn't be necessary if more

mums and dads remembered that our human bodies couldn't function without food 'petrol' and are guaranteed to start 'spluttering' after a while if their *natural* needs are not met.

However, simply stuffing tedious children with sweets or crisps and buns to make them less annoying is not a particularly helpful solution. After all, our little ones are so fuelled by sugar that they are fidgeting around hyperactively, and too much unnecessary fat makes them dull and fat - not exactly what we parents imagine happy, contented children to be!

For this reason, our family simply eats an apple or a piece of bread before going out. And my wife always has a bottle of tap water and a small 'emergency supply' of healthy snacks in her shopping bag anyway.

So, you see, Ernst! The weekly groceries with the family don't necessarily have to be a fiasco, it can actually be really fun for everyone involved...!"

And what about me?: "I'm only ever supposed to think about my child!" Mirjam, the mother of a four-month-old baby, snorts indignantly into her mobile phone. "And what about *my* needs?"

"Of course, you'll miss out temporarily when you have a small child," she reassures Renate, who is already a mum of three, on the other end of the line. "But that's the way it's set up by nature.

As a mother leading animal, our young need us more than average for a while - just like in the animal kingdom - otherwise they wouldn't be able to learn and practise all the inconspicuous human skills, such as consideration and independence or awareness of danger, compassion, logical thinking and things like that, casually in everyday life, even though all this is so enormously important for their later life."

"I realise that, Renate. But what about *me*? I also have to be able to survive," the young mum complains.

"Of course you're right, Mirjam," replies her friend calmly. "That's why I personally stubbornly take the time for a half-hour nap every day - for years, by the way! I absolutely need it if I don't want to suddenly find myself shouting at the children in the afternoon or evening, tired and exasperated. Our children have actually accepted this daily nap ritual surprisingly quickly and leave me completely alone for half an hour while they hang out in the playroom next door or play quietly to themselves. They have probably realised that they can do much more with me again when I am rested, as I will then look after them again cheerfully and patiently and perhaps even do something interesting with them... "

"Yes, but I don't want to be the sole entertainer for my little Endo all the time! I need some time for myself again. Don't you have that need at all?"

"Oh yes, definitely!" Renate immediately agrees with her colleague over the phone. "That's why I've been going to gymnastics once a week in the evening for a long time now and occasionally attend a lecture that interests me. My husband is always kind enough to put the children to bed after dinner - which is always great fun for them too!

And on the other evenings - when the older ones are asleep and before I have to breastfeed the little one again - I still have the opportunity to read a few pages in peace, watch a bit of TV, or enjoy the evening with my husband to get my money's worth mentally, emotionally and in terms of relationships.

But at the moment we only go out together very rarely, as our children only really feel comfortable with my parents and they don't have time to look after them that often.

But I don't think that's so bad because I don't feel like I'm missing out completely. I have such a great job as a mum, which really fulfils and satisfies me deeply.

But as soon as our youngest is about three years old and he can easily stay at home alone with the older ones in the evenings if the neighbour is informed, I will, of course, be happy to have a little more independence and personal free time..."

"Maybe *you* can live with that, but I can't!" Mirjam defends herself in horror.

"Apparently you're just temporarily lowering your personal standards to a minimum and trying to enjoy this toddler phase with all your heart.

But I don't *want* that at all! I didn't study for years and completed an expensive training programme just to rot at home with my husband and child!

When my maternity leave is over, I will definitely be working at least two days a week again as a dentist in the group practice where I was previously working. They're already waiting for me there and have been asking me if I could come back a little earlier..."

"And what are you going to do with Endo on your working days?" Renate enquires carefully. "Does your husband stay with him and play house husband during this time?"

"No, I can forget that! - although I think that men should actually do their bit for childcare too. But in his highly paid managerial job, that's simply not an option. Franz has to be able to stay on the ball around the clock, otherwise he would immediately lose touch and be demoted down the career ladder. And we wouldn't have any of that as a family – financially I mean!

But I can take Endo to daycare near here. I already clarified this a year ago and enrolled him straight away. This crèche has a very good reputation, as it employs many more professionally trained child carers than ordinary daycare centres. And I'm convinced that he'll really like it

there because there's always something going on. Here at home with me, on the other hand, it's often terribly boring for him - as small as he is!"

"But you could always come to us with Endo if you have cabin fever at home," the older woman now eagerly suggests. "Here, your little one would also have other children to entertain him - and always the same ones - with whom he could quickly feel at home."

"Oh, thank you for your offer, Renate!" Mirjam replies happily through her mobile phone. "I'm sure we'll both turn up at your place next week. And then you probably won't be able to get rid of us for two months..."

But this afternoon my Endo and I can at least visit the toddler group in our neighbourhood. I think that's a great thing because you also meet other mums with their toddlers there - and rarely a dad! And I finally, finally get to chat with adults again!

But I still need my old job back as soon as possible because I really want to keep my brain cells fit. And of course, I also want to 'keep the door open' there, otherwise, I'll be 'sawn off' professionally in a few years - as quickly as dental methods and medical services change these days."

"Yes, that could be the case," Renate remarks thoughtfully. "In highly qualified professions, you really do lose touch much more quickly today than you used to. I'm probably a bit better off as an ordinary secretary, although I'm sure I'll have to attend a lot of computer and specialised courses to bring myself up to date before anyone hires me. But that will certainly be feasible, I think..."

"If I'm honest, I'd also want to go to work a few days a week as soon as possible in *your* professional situation," Mirjam now admits, "because life at home just isn't fulfilling for me. Nothing against my little Endo, because he's really cute! But I really need to socialise with other people more often and be able to talk about all sorts of things, keep up to date with the latest news, and be mentally challenged. Just sitting at home, doing the housework, and looking after a baby is really not enough for me. That's certainly not how I imagined my life would be!"

"Do you think that I, as a full-time mum with three children, have become completely stupid in recent years just because I'm not informed about everything that's going on in the world?" asks the colleague on the other phone, a little offended. But Mirjam laughs in amusement and calms her down:

"Oh no, Renate, that's not what I meant at all! But almost everything in your life revolves around your children, the household and your husband, or maybe your neighbours and relatives. But I also need completely different topics to talk about, such as fashion, culture, politics, travelling, etc., otherwise, I'll really go to pieces and my little one and my husband will definitely not be able to stand it..."

"But you talk about what you're most interested in at the moment - and for me, that's almost exclusively the well-being of my family and my closest friends at the moment. Later, however, my perspective will certainly broaden again quite automatically as soon as the children are older. Then they will develop more and more interests of their own and we parents will also be able to pursue our hobbies again, so that our whole family will be confronted with completely new environments, such as kindergarten, school, clubs, music lessons and other courses, which automatically brings with it other topics of conversation.

But at the moment I'm completely happy with our small, manageable children-family world..."

"But it's just not enough for me!" Mirjam repeats vehemently. "Understand, Renate! I'm not naturally a 'mummy type' like you, but I'm interested in what's going on in economics, politics, and culture, for example - in the big, wide public sphere. I almost suffocate at home if I'm not allowed to have any contact with the outside world for too long!

Endo will just have to learn to live with the fact that he has *me* as his mother and not you."

"He will," says her colleague soothingly into the phone. "Every child loves *their* parents from the bottom of their heart, just the way they are! And since your little Endo surely has the same sociable, fun-loving genes as you, he will surely get used to the different nursery caregivers soon and have lots of fun with the changing children in his group.

Of course, babies and toddlers would *never* think of separating themselves from their mothers for hours or even days on end. But if this suddenly becomes part of your little one's everyday life and you at least consistently return to him, then the constant change between the nursery- 'sibling'-environment and the parental home can become something normal and familiar for him, where he feels comfortable.

After all, in addition to your working days, you still have enough time to give your Endo *personal* love and attention.

But be careful! Don't overdo it just because you might feel a little guilty towards him after the nursery days. It's not good for any child to suddenly be the centre of their parents' attention at home all the time and not have to play alone for a second.

But your Endo will surely love it if you just take it easy on him on your 'days at home' and really take him seriously when he needs you. This way, you can continue to have fun together and explore his little world together curiously – but *without* having to read his every wish from his lips!

In this way, you can certainly build an ever deeper relationship with your little one alongside your work and household chores, giving him a strong inner foundation so that he doesn't necessarily become one of those loud,

ruthlessly 'assertive' nursery children who had to fight for their own well-being in unfamiliar surroundings far too early and far too often...

Just be aware of what is really good for your Endo, and then *give* him what he absolutely *needs*. This will ensure that he grows up to be an independent, lovable little personality, even when switching between nursery and you, his parents.

There are various paths that lead to this goal – just as there are many different parents with different outlooks on life. And which parents a child will encounter is simply part of their inevitable destiny..."

"That's true, actually," Mirjam reflects, surprised. "As a child, you're not asked at all what kind of world you want to be placed in. You just have to make do with the circumstances and parents you're given. That's how it was for you and me in the past, too.

Hopefully, my Endo will outlive me as his mother! He won't have it easy with me, as motherliness is not something I was born with..."

"What isn't yet, can still become," says Renate confidently. "With my first child, I think I was quite clumsy too. But over time, you grow into this profession and become more and more absorbed in it – as you can see with me.

Who knows, maybe after your second child, you will suddenly feel that working outside the home is no longer right for you and your family, because you could enjoy your children much more if you focused almost exclusively on them and their upbringing for a few years.

The unique atmosphere of having a toddler doesn't last that long, Mirjam – and soon it will be *irretrievably* over for both of us! Maybe then you'll look back and really long for the Endo baby days of today..."

Answer as needed: "Hey, Mummy," six-year-old Frederick rushes into the kitchen, where his mother Lola is washing dishes. "Do all baby animals come out of their mother's bottom when they are born?"

"Yes, they do," Lola replies. "But don't get the wrong idea! They don't come out of the urethra like your pee or out of the intestines like your poo. Female humans and animals have a third hole that babies can come out of. This is, so to speak, the exit of the amniotic sac in which the young grow in their mother's womb until they are able to come out and breathe and drink on their own."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Frederick breathes a sigh of relief. "I thought the first thing Meier's little kittens would learn about the world today would be shit."

"No, you can rest assured, Frederick.

Were you able to witness her birth?" Lola asks with interest, placing another washed plate on the drainer.

"Yes, I was at Andrin's house to play with him. He took me down to the basement and showed me the nest made of cloths where the mother cat was lying.

The first three offspring were already lying around soaking wet when the last one was just hanging out of her bottom. At first, I was a little shocked, but Andrin said it was perfectly normal and that I should come back to see him tomorrow. Then I would be amazed at how cute the little ones suddenly looked – like soft furry animals.

But we shouldn't pick them up yet, he said, otherwise the mother cat might not want them anymore because they would smell too much like humans too early on..."

"Andrin is absolutely right," confirms the mother, while cleaning a pan in the sink.

"But something is still not entirely clear to me," Frederick stammers.

"Yes, what is it? Just ask!" Lola encourages him, looking at him kindly.

"Did I also come out of a birth canal like that when I was born, Mummy?"

"Yes, indeed!" she replies with a smile. "It works similarly for us humans as it does for animals. But you can't imagine, can you? Fortunately, you were much, much smaller back then than you are now – about this big!"

The mother shows him the span of about fifty centimetres with her wet hands and then continues excitedly:

"And your head was about ten centimetres in diameter, I would say. With that head size, you just managed to squeeze through my narrow birth canal – and before you, Evi and Simona. But it wasn't just hard work for you babies, it was also hard work for me as your mother because I had to push you out of my belly through that narrow hole down there so that I could finally hold you in my arms afterwards.

By the way, I have a picture book about having children over there on the living room shelf. Would you like to take a look at it?"

"Oh, no thanks! I know enough now," says Frederick, turning to leave. "I'd rather stay outside with Andrin and keep working on our box-and-skateboard car. Bye, Mummy...!"

Fussy babies: "I assume, ladies and gentlemen, that each and every one of you is all too familiar with the problem of having a crying baby at home from time to time that cannot be calmed down," says Silvia, an educational adviser, at the fully booked lecture evening, looking meaningfully around the room. "I can relate to this myself, as I am a full-time mother of four preschool children, the youngest of whom is currently just under six months old..."

Incidentally, despite having a full-time job himself, my husband has agreed to put our children to bed and look after them tonight so that I can hold this discussion with you here in peace.

As you know, small children cry particularly often because they don't yet have many other ways of *telling* us parents that they are feeling very uncomfortable or need our help in some other way. Unfortunately, as mothers and fathers, we usually feel just as uncomfortable with a crying child as the child itself does. That is why today we want to get together and discuss what we can do in such a situation to restore our well-being – that of our baby and our own – as quickly as possible."

Jenny, a young mother, then speaks up and says:

"When I know for sure that my Robin can't be hungry or have a full nappy at the moment, I then check whether he might be ill and that's why he's crying."

"Good, Jenny!" nods the educational adviser. "First of all, we should always check whether our crying child has any *physical* needs that we urgently need to 'satisfy'.

However, if it clearly no longer needs food, is already wearing clean nappies, and has definitely had enough sleep, we should briefly check its state of health, at least as far as we can as laypeople. This is a sensible strategy.

So, we ask ourselves: Is its forehead too hot – because it has a fever? Is it constantly biting things and therefore probably teething? Is it pulling its legs up convulsively because of stomach ache? Does it have a rash somewhere that is terribly itchy, or has it injured itself somewhere without noticing?

Or does it seem as if it is suffering from an invisible, internal pain that only a doctor could properly diagnose? Etc.

I have heard of the craziest medical diagnoses that have caused toddlers to scream for hours or even days on end, without their parents being able to help them..."

"But when our little Fabia cries," Pascal, a father in his mid-thirties, begins, smiling at his wife Irma beside him, "we both know almost for certain that she's not ill, but simply bored out of her mind. That can also be a reason for annoying baby cries.

At two months old, our little one is already surprisingly interested in her surroundings, so much so that she really hates having to lie alone somewhere where nothing is happening. However, she is very happy when I play the harmonica for her, or when the neighbour's daughter and other visitors come by, or when I carry her around the flat in a sling to show her all sorts of things or take her to the little shop in the neighbourhood where we are sure to meet someone..."

"I know what you mean," confirms Piera, who is sitting opposite the two of them in a circle. "My Ivo always wants something to do too. But afterwards he's so overstimulated that he ends up screaming and can't get to sleep. He can easily crow his heart out for an hour and a half until, try as I might, I no longer know what else I can do to calm him down.

Yesterday, I finally laid him down in his cot in desperation and put my headphones on in the next room to drown out the terrible crying with music, at least a little bit – until he finally fell asleep at some point."

"Well done, Piera!" Silvia says encouragingly. "You seemed to know exactly that your little one was fine, but that he just couldn't fall asleep because he had taken in too many impressions. In such cases, it is really best not to respond to the baby, but to let them 'calm down' in their *own* way, even if this involves deafening screams for some children and can take an 'eternity'...

Another time, however, as his mother, you could make sure to rescue Ivo from such overstimulation early enough and bring him home to his familiar surroundings *before* he has to freak out. But of course, that's not always possible, I'm fully aware of that."

Piera gratefully accepts the advice and decides – even for her own sake – to be more considerate of her little boy and his clearly still very limited capacity for absorbing in the near future.

And already the next participant in today's parenting evening is reporting:

"When our Mario, who is currently three months old, can't stop crying, I tend to think that he is jealous of anyone who talks to my wife for a little too long – including me and our two other children. Can that even be possible with such a small child, or am I just imagining things?"

"No, no, you're definitely not imagining things, Fritz, because babies can easily react like that too," the adviser explains emphatically. "Children develop at such different rates that it's impossible to predict exactly when they will feel jealous for the first time, start smiling or become shy around strangers, and so on.

Your Mario seems to be quite precocious when it comes to jealousy and extremely sensitive to whether or not he is getting enough attention from your wife. Perhaps she gave him away once lately, which he found very upsetting..."

"Are you sure?" asks Fritz, surprised. "We left him with our neighbour recently when we wanted to spend two days at the amusement park with the two older children.

But lots of parents do that with their babies from time to time, don't they? That's no reason for our little one to make such a fuss every day and not let Mummy out of his sight for a moment without immediately starting to cry – at least, that's what I think."

"This separation must have been terrible for your little Mario," Silvia replies calmly, "even if many other children would not have reacted so strongly. As a well-protected baby who was not used to being in a nursery, how could he possibly know that his mummy would ever come back to him if she suddenly disappeared from his sight and did not reappear for two days without warning? She could have left him forever..."

It would be best if your wife took Mario's separation anxiety seriously and stayed close to him as much as possible in the near future so that he can feel confident again that she will not suddenly run away from him again. This is hardly a case of a spoilt child simply 'spreading terror', but rather a terrible panic arising from completely natural toddler logic. And as parents, you should not thoughtlessly fuel this panic in your baby – especially when there is absolutely no compelling reason for it, such as the mother being in hospital or similar.

But that doesn't mean that your wife should only be there for her little darling. Next time you, Fritz, want to discuss something with her, but your Mario wants to split you up with his screaming, make sure you stand up to your little one! Explain to him in a friendly but firm manner that he will have to wait a moment, and then continue talking to your wife as if you couldn't hear your little son's cries.

You can act with confidence because this cannot be a case of separation anxiety, as he can clearly see that his mummy is staying and not leaving him. Unfortunately, she just doesn't have time for him at the moment, and he has to learn to accept *that*."

"Let's see if I can do it," says Fritz with a grin. "But thanks for the tip, Silvia! I hadn't realised that, on the one hand, there are very clear reasons *not* to let a child cry, but to quickly solve their problem or not provoke it in the first place – but that there are just as many other reasons why I don't need to worry about their crying at all, as long as I have already met their most urgent needs to the best of my knowledge and belief. So not all crying is the same!"

"That's right," Silvia replies with a smile. "There are some things that we parents simply cannot change because they are part of the current reality that a toddler has to learn to cope with, such as mummy or daddy wanting to spend time with siblings or other people from time to time.

The same applies to the fact that babies, even with the best will in the world, cannot yet move around everywhere on their own like the other, older members of the family. Some children experience this limitation as terrible, constant frustration and communicate their unpleasant feelings to everyone around them with their nerve-wracking cries – until they finally, finally take their first steps themselves..."

"Tell me about it, Silvia," sighs a very young mother suddenly. "At first, I thought our Nadja probably had three-month colic. But the three months

passed and the little one still torments us every day with her screaming. Meanwhile, however, it is clear to see that she is constantly trying desperately to move away from where she is lying. She would love to crawl after me or my husband right now so that she can always see exactly what we are doing. Unfortunately, at five months old, she is not yet able to do this."

"And what do you do then, Lena?" Silvia asks the course participant with interest.

"I carry her around a lot so she doesn't cry non-stop. I just can't stand it for long periods of time! But at least I've learned to cook with one hand lately..."

General laughter.

"But sometimes, when my arm is about to fall off from carrying her so much, I have no choice but to put her in the playpen or rocker near me so she can play, which she always responds to with terrible screams.

Fortunately, she sleeps from time to time, and without any problems. Then suddenly it's amazingly quiet in our flat..."

"Why don't you just tie Nadja to your chest or back with the sling?" Marina asks her. "Then you'll have your hands free and the problem will be solved."

"That would be nice!" replies Lena with a shrug. "My little girl *hates* any kind of carrying device, and has done ever since we came back from the hospital – it's as if I'm trying to restrain or suffocate her! She reacts the same way to tight jumpers, socks, or trousers. Everything has to be loose and light so that she feels comfortable!

But why she has no problem with my arm, which entwines her around when I carry her, is beyond me. In any case, it's the only way for both of us to give our eardrums a break from time to time during the day..."

"At least your children don't constantly frighten you by turning blue from screaming so much like our Patrick does," says a tall, slim woman named Mathilde, who is always on the go. "I didn't even know such a thing existed before. But now our little one has taught us otherwise."

"And what do you do when that happens?" Piera asks her neighbour sympathetically. "I would panic if my child's face suddenly turned blue. Do you need to call the paediatrician every time?"

"No, no, it's not that bad! But of course, I didn't know that at first, and I rushed Patrick to the hospital in a state of complete panic. I blamed myself for not taking him out of his cot as soon as he started crying, but instead letting him cry and not thinking anything of it. But he quickly became so enraged that he seemed to be about to explode, his face turning bright red and then blue. I blamed myself and feared that he might suffocate and die on the way to the hospital...!

But the paediatrician there reassured me after taking a close look at the little one and kindly explained that some children simply get so upset that they cry so hard they don't get enough oxygen and therefore turn blue. But no one can kill themselves by holding their breath in a fit of rage. The body would start to fight back early enough and force breathing to resume naturally in time.

At most, it would be possible for the little one to get a hernia from roaring, but that is now easy to operate on and, surprisingly, does not occur very often.

So, I could go home with Patrick without worrying, and I shouldn't be alarmed if his face turned blue again during his next crying fits. Otherwise, he could become infected by my fear and believe that he himself is in danger. This, in turn, could result in our little one developing a full-blown anxiety neurosis over time – and our whole family along with him – until all our thoughts revolve around doing everything we can to prevent him from starting to cry...

It is obvious that such upbringing is not good for any child, the doctor continued, and we should not engage in such unconscious blackmail games with our baby.

So since then, my husband and I have been consciously trying to remain calm and collected when Patrick once again works himself up into such a rage that his face turns blue. But it's certainly not easy!"

"I can imagine," Silvia says empathetically. "Thank you so much for explaining this variation of baby crying to us, Mathilde. Who knows, maybe the rest of us will be confronted with a similar situation at some point, whether with our own child or someone else's.

So you see, dear men and women: no two babies are alike," Silvia summarises as the course instructor and looks around the group again. "That's why there is no single parental response that is equally good for every toddler or even the only correct one.

After the birth of a baby, we as parents must always start from scratch again, even if it is our fifth or tenth child, to learn to understand the different types of crying and the reasons behind it. This means that we have no choice but to try out everything possible with *each* child in the first few months – you could almost say 'to puzzle out' – until our baby slowly begins to feel more and more understood by us. Perhaps, over time, their crying will even become almost unnecessary, because they will realise that they can show us, their parents, what they really need in other, less deafening ways..."

"It's easy for you to say!" says a participant whom no one here knows yet, speaking gruffly. She introduces herself as Gerda from the neighbouring village.

"It may be useful to do or not do certain things with your children, but you don't know my Pino! He doesn't just cry at the same time every day or for the same reason so that you can figure out what's wrong with him. No, he cries almost constantly – regardless of whether it's day or night, whether you carry him around or not, whether he's lying in his cot or being carried in my arms, regardless of what he's wearing or what he's been given to eat, regardless of whether we stay at home or go somewhere – he cries almost non-stop!

Maybe there's half an hour in between when he lies still and stares at something, but then it starts again, the roaring, and doesn't stop for quite a while.

You probably can't imagine it, but it's really true. I'm not exaggerating at all. It's enough to make you run away, I tell you!

And that's why I can hardly entrust Pino to anyone else to look after him – except my husband, who is currently away on business abroad, and our brilliant thirteen-year-old neighbour, who clearly has no problem spending a few hours with our screaming boy again tonight.

But his constant yelling overwhelms his four grandparents, for example, as well as my really patient friends and neighbours who are around the same age. They have all recently withdrawn from us in horror – which, in my opinion, is completely understandable. How many times have I stood at Pino's bedside and thought: 'I'll throw you out of the window if you don't stop crying...!'

Sobbing, Gerda breaks off and hides her face in her hands.

"That must be really hard for you," Silvia says sympathetically, and then asks:

"But you did take your Pino to the paediatrician, didn't you?"

"Of course," sniffs the young woman, wiping away her tears with the back of her hand. "But he just keeps saying that Pino is perfectly healthy. I just need to be patient, and then this whole nightmare will surely be over soon. But now Pino is already over four months old and shows no signs of stopping his crying anytime soon.

After just a few weeks, your babies seem to be at least somewhat trainable and can learn, for example, that Mummy won't run away from them or that they will always be fed on time so that they can easily wait patiently instead of crying. Or they smile at you when you talk to them or sing something to them. But none of that works with Pino."

"Then he must be suffering from a perception disorder," replies the adviser thoughtfully, continuing in a sympathetic tone:

"No child cries their heart out for months on end without reason, Gerda. Your Pino probably perceives the world around him very differently from us so-called 'normal' people.

Perhaps he cannot feel your love and warmth at all, cannot recognise your face as his one and only like other toddlers, but is simply lost in an endless jumble of impressions that he does not know what to do with. Such brain disorders do exist.

But it could also be that he is extremely intelligent and simply panics because everything looks much more threatening to him than it does to us. I once read about an autistic child who was even afraid of falling into the depths between the wool threads of the carpet. His perception was so sharp that it was almost as if he could see into nano-dimensions through a microscope...

Or perhaps your Pino sees something like 'ghosts' that frighten him because his body, due to some metabolic disorder, produces a hallucinogen that causes delusions as if he were under the influence of drugs. It would only be logical for him to cry out in panic for help all the time so that the world around him would finally deliver him from it. Perhaps there is a suitable medication for him...

Or it could also be that, due to a mental disability, he does not 'hear' how loud he is shouting and therefore does not suffer at all from the fact that he is making such deafening noises. For him, screaming would then be a completely normal expression, like breathing or babbling. He may not even notice how piercing it is, who knows.

Of course, none of these options would be 'wonderful,' but with an accurate diagnosis, you would at least know what is wrong with your Pino and how you could help him and yourselves in a meaningful way. In any case, it is very important that you ask your paediatrician to refer you to specialists at the children's hospital as soon as possible so that you can finally get some clarity – before you really lose it and do something to your little one in desperation."

Gerda smiles through her veil of tears, her mouth twisted in pain and is simply overjoyed that, for once, no one has accused her of mistreating her little one and told her what she should or should not do.

No, Pino seems to have an inner problem that manifests itself in his roaring. She can easily imagine that now. And she will get to the bottom of this problem – whatever it may be – tomorrow, no matter how many doctors and therapists she has to visit to do so. If only she could do something for her little one and no longer have to doubt herself as a mother. Perhaps there really is still hope for her small, tormented family... Meanwhile, Silvia has turned back to the whole group and cheerfully says: "You see, folks, there are countless reasons for our dear little ones' deadly annoying cries – some harmless, but others that we should urgently investigate.

The only problem is that such crying rarely leaves us unscathed. We parents also have a sensitive psyche, and we often experience our own

child's crying as a reproach and thus as a painful blow to our self-esteem. We quickly feel guilty when we are unable to satisfy our baby, even though we have tried everything possible.

And we feel embarrassed on the street or in the shopping centre with our screaming bundle in front of other people because we believe that every passerby thinks we are completely incapable of bringing up our child properly.

We are only too happy to believe these fabricated disparaging remarks ourselves, and in such moments, we usually feel a terrible urge to sink into the ground, run away, or simply 'shut our child up' in some way..."

A murmur of agreement ripples through the group because everyone has experienced this first-hand in one way or another.

Then the leader continues:

"Basically, this means that, depending on our own disposition, every time we hear a baby cry, one or even several ancient complexwounds in our soul are touched and reopened, which is naturally extremely painful, so that we inevitably have to react to it: with feelings of guilt, self-deprecation, shame or panic-stricken defensiveness, and usually with a lot of anger towards the screaming child. It is our psychological 'shadow', our own dark, *unconscious* side of the soul that drags us into all these painful emotions and thoughts..."

"It's actually really crazy," Pascal interjects, impressed, "what can go on inside us at moments like that, even though all we want is for our baby to be happy. But when we can't satisfy our little one, this terrible despair and anger inevitably explodes inside us and threatens to consume us.

When I imagine having to endure all the noise from our Fabia over the last few weeks, Gerda, just like you did with your Pino! I don't know if I could have endured the pain, shame, guilt, and self-reproach without eventually lashing out at the little one in blind rage..."

"Over time, you develop a kind of callousness in your soul," she says, smiling a little more confidently now. "How else could I have left the house with Pino without wanting to disappear into thin air because of all the stares?

Once, I handed our screaming Pino to a woman who was staring at me and my husband with terrible reproach and told her she could keep him since she obviously knew better how to deal with him.

But I can tell you, she was gone in no time...!"

Everyone in the group laughs heartily, and Gerda seems visibly more at ease again.

"Thank you, Gerda!" says the educational adviser to her. "You've just shown us what we can do to make our child's crying more bearable – *after* we've *checked* all the possible reasons for it, of course:

By *consciously* 'staying calm', namely, and by 'distancing ourselves internally from the baby's crying', 'taking it with humour or sarcasm', or 'deliberately blocking it out'.

These are all ways that can help us, in addition to the emotional strain that every child's crying causes us as parents, to avoid being overwhelmed by our own inner 'shadow' until our already wounded complexes are torn open and left bleeding...

That's why it would be helpful if we parents *didn't* view the public as a stage, as if we had to constantly give other people a flawless performance with our child.

This kind of thing really overwhelms all of us and tempts us to simply *force* our little ones to behave 'properly' at some point – even if we always intended to leave their personal toddler territory untouched, respect their individuality, and never misuse them for our own self-expression.

But such inconsistencies and inner compulsions quickly arise when we carelessly allow ourselves to be swayed by our *unconscious*, spiritual 'shadow' and its fears in public, and let ourselves be carried away by our despair. It would make more sense to distance ourselves internally with our *conscious* 'self' part so that we can first think calmly about how we *want to* respond to the crying problem."

"Then we should do exactly what I taught my older children," Marina beams suddenly, looking around at the expectant faces of the other parents. "As almost every child in kindergarten learns, we adults should also be able to simply imagine our spiritual 'shadow' on a leash' and hold it back with healthy authority when it thinks it needs to be ashamed of our baby's crying in front of other people, or when it tries to make us feel guilty just because we would like to stick a big plaster over our little one's screaming mouth..."

"Yes, exactly! That's right," Silvia replies eagerly and then explains: "We all have to learn to be completely honest about our anger and despair in moments like these, without allowing these emotions and thoughts to run away with us like a horse that has bolted. Otherwise, it could one day become really dangerous for our baby, and we would spend the rest of our lives blaming ourselves for doing something terrible to our little screamer because we were blinded by our own emotional complex pain..."

So, in baby-yelling situations like this, make sure you rein in your emotional horses – your 'spiritual shadow' – with your 'conscious self' and learn to *remain calm*, even if it's not easy because people will look at you and shake their heads. Even if you think you are the worst parent in the world, you should remain calm with your 'conscious self', even if you feel terribly guilty or just want to run away.

Just take a step back internally – wherever you happen to be with your screaming child – count slowly to at least twenty, disconnect yourself from

all the pain, imagine wrapping an *invisible, protective, radiant hooded cloak* around your soul, and only then bend over your screaming child again!

You will be amazed at how different it will suddenly seem! Even if it is still screaming and shouting at the top of its lungs, the terrible sound coming from its throat will suddenly no longer bother you, let alone hurt you spiritually. The roaring simply rolls off your indestructible psychological protective cloak, so that despite everything, you can suddenly look at your baby again with kindness and a smile on your lips. Perhaps you will now calmly stroke his cheek or head and talk to him lovingly, soothingly, and cheerfully, even if it does not help at all and he continues to cry..."

"Cheerful?" Fritz asks incredulously. "Did you really say 'cheerful', Silvia?"

"Yes, I did," she confirms emphatically.

"As soon as we, as parents, manage to prevent our child's cries from penetrating our spiritually complex wounds, we become so free and calm inside that our own childlike, carefree and *cheerful* side can re-emerge – our 'inner child', so to speak.

This part of our soul must hide in the furthest corner of our inner psyche as quickly as lightning whenever our 'shadow' begins to rage dangerously within us out of sheer desperation at the cries of our real baby and starts to inflate itself into a monster.

But when our invisible 'inner child' senses that our 'conscious self' has once again become a strong, wise leading animal for the other parts of our soul and is therefore holding the 'shadow' kindly but firmly on its invisible 'leash' like a wild but comical dog, the child in us quickly dares to come out again and automatically puts us in a calm, cheerful mood that even the worst shouting from outside cannot disturb.

So, try this at home: take your inner child *in your imagination* by the hand and hop around your home like a curious and confident four- or five-year-old! You will see that in this way, all your adult fears and compulsions will immediately fall away, which had previously been imposed on you by your own panic-stricken 'shadow' like a concrete tube – until you could only perceive the world through desperate, narrow tunnel vision, filled with shouting and the desire to 'do everything right'.

Our parental panic is particularly distressing for our firstborn children, as they do not yet have siblings who can provide a sense of light-heartedness and cheerfulness alongside their anxious parents, and who can playfully convey to the crying infant that everything is certainly not as bad as it feels at that moment.

So, if we can bring out our 'inner child' by consciously staying calm and letting it put a smile on our formerly tense face, this is not only good for us, but also for our baby – even if it doesn't stop crying.

But at least this way, our own horizons gradually expand again, allowing us to think calmly and confidently until we perhaps even come up with a completely new idea of how we can help our little crying treasure after all. A reliable, consistent daily routine is usually very good and reassuring for our child. But sometimes a playful surprise, an unexpected reaction from us, or a sudden change in the daily schedule is needed to get our baby out of a crying rut and at the same time ease our own tension a little.

Our 'inner child' knows best what we could do to achieve this because it is in its nature to try out new things in our soul every now and then, simply because it enjoys doing so. So, let's allow ourselves to be tempted by our own childishness every now and then – but only when nothing else has helped – to do something unusual, imaginative, and funny, and hope that our baby will forget that it was just about to cry at the top of its lungs...

But if that is not the case, thanks to our 'inner child', we can now leave the room of our crying child much more relaxed and calmer, either to seek real help somewhere else or simply turn our attention to something else for a while, while the baby continues to cry on its own. That way, we can at least show him that we, as his parental leading animals, are no longer hysterically upset or frightened by his crying, but that we have the situation under control somehow.

Of course, we should check on our little one from time to time and try again to figure out what he's crying about, but we shouldn't let it get us down – for our baby's sake too!

And now I think that with all these helpful ideas we have gathered here together this evening, we are once again a little better equipped to accompany our dear little ones through their young lives – *not perfectly*, but in our own spiritually strengthened, unique, and *best possible* way.

In any case, I wish you all a wonderful, interesting time with your babies, whether they are crying or happily content at the moment...!"

A sense of security in everyday life: "I'm going to build the station here next to the tracks," decides five-year-old Marcel one morning while playing in his bedroom and kneels down in front of his bed with a piece of wood from his train set in his hand.

"Yes, good," says his sister Naomi, who is one and a half years younger and crouching on the floor near the window. She then continues to concentrate on adding wooden rails, sometimes making a right turn, sometimes a left turn or a straight section, even adding switches and junctions – until, after a while, half the carpet is covered with a tangle of tracks.

"Great, isn't it, Mummy?" she suddenly says proudly to Sarina, who has been ironing one item of laundry after another in the background the whole time and has already folded them on the ironing board.

"Yes, that looks great!" she nods in agreement. "It makes you want to hop on one of your trains right away and explore all the different routes."

"I've already started," Marcel says cheerfully, crawling his wooden train away from the station and onto the nearest tracks. Naomi is now also slowly driving a wooden locomotive around the room, and for a long time all you can hear is the sliding of the two children's knees and, every now and then, the 'honking' of their trains when invisible animals or people have to be shooed off the tracks...

But suddenly the boy stops in front of the wardrobe and blurts out:

"What a shame! There should be a way to climb up onto the wardrobe."

"Oh yes!" Naomi exclaims enthusiastically and jumps up. "But how?"

"I'll get a large piece of cardboard from our storage box and you can bring the roll of tape and our children's scissors," suggests Marcel, and the two of them are already out the door.

Shortly afterwards, they are back in front of their wardrobe, eagerly tinkering, cutting, and gluing. Together, they try to attach several small and larger strips of cardboard one after another to the side of the wardrobe door so that a wobbly path soon runs diagonally upwards. However, when they try to place a railway carriage on top, their cardboard tracks inevitably collapse every time and the train falls to the ground.

After a few unsuccessful attempts, the children finally look over at Sarina pleadingly. She has been discreetly watching her children's activities out of the corner of her eye but didn't want to interfere unless she was urgently needed.

But now she carefully unplugs the iron and kneels down next to Marcel and Naomi in front of the cupboard. Together, they try out whether it would be sufficient to stick the outer edges of the cardboard strips to the cupboard door in places, but unfortunately, the wooden wagons get stuck to the adhesive strips when they pass through. What could be done?

"Don't we have a few old cardboard tubes in the basement?" Sarina suddenly wonders.

"Yes, absolutely! We could use them as tunnels. That's a great idea, Mummy!" Marcel exclaims happily and dashes out of the room, little Naomi following close behind.

Sarina returns to the ironing board with a smile and continues working until the two little ones rush back into the room, beaming and with red cheeks. With great enthusiasm, they now stick tube after tube to the cupboard door by themselves, and when they can no longer reach high enough with their hands, they simply climb onto their wooden chairs to finish the upper part

of their original railway tunnel. Finally, the work is done, and the top of the old second-hand wardrobe has been reached.

"But how can we drive the carriages up through the tunnel? We can't push them because our hands don't fit through the pipes," Marcel remarks disappointedly.

But that's no problem at all for Naomi. Without further ado, she simply lets one of the wooden locomotives 'fly' higher and higher on her flat hand and nimbly climbs over the chair herself onto the sturdy waist-high cupboard – something Sarina would not have thought her three-year-old daughter capable of yet. But confident of victory, she grins down at her mother and brother from her high seat and then lets her little locomotive race down the sloping row of cardboard tubes until it tumbles onto the tracks below.

Of course, Marcel can't be held back either. He quickly gathers a few carriages and climbs up onto the cupboard to join his sister.

And so now both children take turns squealing with joy as they rattle their wooden carts through the homemade tunnel, clapping their hands enthusiastically every time they come out at the bottom.

Meanwhile, the mother continues ironing quietly, smiling to herself, so that the piles of finished laundry slowly grow higher and higher and all the work will soon be done again for the next few weeks. Meanwhile, Naomi and Marcel are still blissfully and peacefully absorbed in their game, climbing up and down, repairing their model railway mountain tunnel countless times with more adhesive tape, holding their stomachs with laughter in between, and seemingly not needing any maternal attention at all.

'It seems,' Sarina thinks to herself, 'that the only thing that matters is that I am here as a mother and can interrupt my housework at any time if the children need me – for a quick look of appreciation, for example, or to help solve a problem like earlier, but also as an impartial mediator or, every now and then, as an enthusiastic playmate for a while!'

But when all their natural needs have been met – as is the case now – there is clearly nothing better for children than simply playing to their heart's content close to their mummy or daddy.

But why my girlfriend still feels compelled to get up at five in the morning when she wants to do the ironing – so that her children can still sleep – is a complete mystery to me...'

Lunch specials: "Hello, Michelle! Why are you crying?" asks Pia, while cleaning the neighbourhood playground, to a child from the nursery who has stopped near her, looking confused.

"I don't know where to go for lunch today. Since the last holidays, I've been with a different family every time," complains the five-year-old girl with tears in her eyes.

"Come on! Let's ask where you were yesterday," Pia reassures the girl and takes her by the hand. "I'm sure they'll know where you should go today."

Michelle points to the other end of the street and goes with the friendly neighbour. On the way, Pia asks the little girl:

"But tell me, Michelle! Don't you ever eat at home during the week? Your mum doesn't go to work every day."

"That's true," Michelle replies, sniffing as she trots alongside Pia to the back block of flats. "On Thursdays and Fridays, Mummy is always at home and I don't have to go to after-school care until dinner time like I usually do."

"See, it's not so bad after all," Pia tries to comfort the girl. "You're only with other families for lunch three days a week and you're at after-school care in the afternoons."

But the little girl replies dejectedly:

"But on Thursday, the neighbourhood kids have lunch at *our* house – and then Mummy doesn't have time to listen to me when I want to tell her something. And the older kids are always so wild and loud that I'm glad when they finally leave."

"Yes, I can understand that, Michelle. But at least you have your mother to yourself on Thursday afternoon and Friday. And your father has time for you at the weekend, doesn't he?"

"No, that's not true!" Michelle protests. "The weekend is the worst! We usually go to visit someone or someone comes to our house. And then the adults talk and talk and talk. And I have to play with the other kids, even though I'd much rather do something on my own with Mummy and Daddy..."

Unemployed children: During the long summer holidays, nine-year-old Kevin comes down to the laundry room where his mother Edwina is working, his shoulders slumped and a depressed look on his face, and sighs:

"I'm so bored, Mummy! Do you know what else I could do?"

"Why don't you just play with Jelena and Elias? You built a really cool knight's castle on the balcony the other day."

"Oh, I don't want to play anymore."

"Why don't you go for a bike ride with your friend Bruno like you did a few days ago? You really enjoyed it and the weather is still lovely. You could take a picnic with you this time..."

"No, I don't feel like it today," Kevin replies.

"But I can't go on an outing with you children today because it's laundry day," Edwina replies somewhat irritably and sets about sorting the family's mountain of clothes according to washing temperatures.

"You've got it good, Mummy," Kevin pouts. "You're never bored – only us kids are."

"Oh, that's easy to change," Edwina laughs. "Come and sit here with me on the other stool and help me sort the laundry!"

This basket on the left is for cold 30-degree laundry, this one for medium 40 degrees and this one on the right for everything that needs to be washed at a high temperature of 60 degrees. You can see which pile each item belongs to from the laundry symbols on the clothes – dark colours go at the back and light colours at the front."

Kevin is completely bewildered and stammers:

"But, but I can't do that! It's much too difficult for me."

"Oh, come on," his mother reassures him encouragingly. "A clever boy like you *can* do that easily. And if you're ever unsure, you can always ask me. So come on! Let's get to work!"

Shortly afterwards, Jelena and Elias suddenly appear in the laundry room because they missed their big brother upstairs in the flat. When they see what he is doing, they desperately want to help. And so it happens that on this boring holiday morning, the three children learn how to sort clothes, load the washing machine, measure out the washing powder, select the right programme, and then hang even large items of laundry workmanlike on the line together so that they can dry properly.

Every time a machine finishes washing, they enthusiastically run down to the basement of the apartment building with their mother and divide the chores comradely among themselves in the laundry room, so that each child has something appropriate to do according to their age.

Edwina, on the other hand, is only needed as a source of advice after a while and smiles as she accompanies her hard-working little workers through their exciting household adventure...

In the evening, when Father Sandro comes home from work, the children immediately rush up to him and tell him excitedly what they have been doing all day.

He is quite astonished and, after listening to the joyful story, shakes his head and says:

"In poor countries, you have to protect children from *too much* work because they are often exploited by adults. But in this country, there seems to be a kind of 'child unemployment' because many parents do the housework themselves so as not to overburden their little darlings. You, on the other hand, seem to have found a solution that lies somewhere in the middle and works well for *everyone*. Really great!"

"Yes, we even made a list with Mummy this afternoon," explains Jelena, who will be starting secondary school soon, proudly. "There are lots more things on it that we can learn over the next few weeks. And we drew little pictures next to them for Elias because he can't read yet.

Look, Dad, the list is on the fridge! It says, for example: vacuuming, dusting, cleaning toilets and sinks, mopping, cooking simple meals, washing up, tidying the kitchen, cleaning windows, changing bed linen, watering and repotting plants, going shopping on my own, changing light bulbs, cleaning and oiling the bike, pumping up tyres and changing brake pads, bundling up old paper, sewing on buttons and mending seams, stacking firewood and much more."

"You've got quite a lot planned," says the father, impressed.

"We can *learn* everything, Dad! "Kevin replies seriously. "At the moment, I can only clean my bike on my own if you show me how. But Jelena can already clear the kitchen table, water the plants, or vacuum a room. And Elias will just do everything with Mummy for now, until he's a bit older.

At least the three of us won't get bored as quickly as we did before!" the boy grins mischievously, adding:

"By the way, Mummy said that as soon as we can do all these chores without help, we kids can look after ourselves if she has to go to hospital or wants to go away with you, Daddy, for the weekend. Of course, I don't want anything to happen to Mummy or for you to leave us home alone all the time, but it must be a good feeling to be able to do everything that needs to be done around the house *by yourself*.

It's just a shame that we have to go back to school soon! The teachers there always give us something to do so that we don't get bored – even when we're almost grown up. And only then can we finally, finally get a proper job.

Why don't we learn how to do everyday tasks like the ones on our list in primary school? It would be just as important as arithmetic, writing, and reading, and it would definitely be good for *all* children...!"

Toy guns: "What on earth are you doing, Charlotte?" Nelly scolds into the phone one day. "You let my Tatjana play with a gun when she was at your house this morning. You know very well that I have forbidden my children to play with any war toys."

"Then you should also forbid Tatjana from entering our flat and playing with my children," her neighbour Charlotte promptly replies. "You can't expect me to keep your child away from our toys when she wants to be here all the time.

Here, it's allowed to run around with a toy gun every now and then and shoot until your ears ring."

"But you're not a military fan!" Nelly exclaims, bewildered, on the other end of the line.

"That's exactly why I didn't stop Isidor and Alexis at the fair last year when they wanted to buy plastic guns with their pocket money," Charlotte explains calmly and firmly over the phone. "I would rather our boys satisfy their need for pompous, masculine demonstrations of combativeness now, as six- and eight-year-old children, than as adults when they are drafted into the military.

And when your Tatjana looked at me so pleadingly today because she wanted to join in too, I just got out the old pistol from my own childhood. You should have seen her beaming with joy as she fired away with my boys – even though she's a girl! They blew through loads of firecrackers today..."

"But Charlotte, you can't be serious about letting our children playfully act out killing people!"

"No, I definitely don't intend to do that, Nelly! I'm talking about something completely different.

Our two boys are naturally rather 'scaredy-cats', so they like to take on the role of the invincible or even the villain, so that at least in their games they can feel strong and confident, like the heroes in all the stories about robbers and pirates that they know.

The more anxious children are, the greater their need to be able to defend themselves with a gun – even if it is only for play. Brave children and adults do not feel this need at all!

And even if you, as a mother, strictly forbid your children to play with guns, they will eventually find a broken branch in the forest and shout, 'Bang, bang!', to make it look like they are shooting. Or they use the same sticks as swords and fight each other – regardless of whether their parents approve or not. So you can never completely keep them away from it.

That's why it's almost inevitable that a few times a year, groups of children suddenly form in our neighbourhood and spend a while ambushing each other with loud cheers, throwing snowballs, cowboy guns, corn kernels, or water pistols, depending on the season.

But normally they soon put their heads together again peacefully, swap football cards, turn the climbing tower into a hut, or play jumping games and similar activities.

But right now, our children find it most exciting to sneak *together* through the entire flat or garden, hunting some invisible enemy, only to overwhelm them with loud capsule gun bangs.

"No, of course not, Charlotte!" Nelly has to admit. "But I still can't stand it when children aim their murder weapons at me or other adults around

them for fun. It makes me feel terribly attacked and somehow helpless, even though there is no real danger to me. It must be some kind of natural reflex inside me..."

"Yes, I feel exactly the same way!" Charlotte replies eagerly. "That's why I talked to Alexis, Isidor, and Tatjana about this topic in detail this morning and explained to them that it's human nature to feel instantly attacked, as if in a real war when a (toy) weapon is pointed at you because real guns can kill a person in seconds.

I also told them emphatically that in reality there is no turning back once someone has been shot, even if the shooter suddenly feels sorry afterwards. A gun is a *dead*bringing weapon and not a toy to be handled carelessly...

In any case, the children were visibly impressed by what I had described to them in a very serious tone, and we then tried it out on ourselves to see how it feels when someone is targeting you.

As a result, throughout the entire morning, none of the children showed the slightest intention of targeting each other or outsiders while shooting like a madman and 'catching murderers'. Instead, they concentrated entirely on their invisible ghost enemies, so that there were no arguments among them."

"That's wonderful!" Nelly replies irritably on the other phone. "It seems like you always have a super clever answer ready for every objection I make. But you know what, Charlotte? At least I won't have to listen to that gunfire in my own flat for the next few years like you. But that's your own fault!"

"I don't think it will last long," Charlotte replies calmly on the phone. "Because I know from experience that in a week or two, the whole thing will be over and our guns will be gathering dust in some toy box for many months to come.

In any case, all the children I know are only interested in this banging for as long as it satisfies their needs. After that, they feel so strong inside that they no longer need all the shooting drama and prefer to pass the time with their usual toys.

And that's exactly what I want to achieve...!

It's all about balance: "Look, Dad, how awful this child's teeth look!" exclaims eight-year-old Pius, horrified, as he watches a television programme with his father Aldo, and eleven-year-old sister Birgit. "They're completely black and rotten!"

"You're right, that looks really bad!" Aldo replies, also impressed.

When the programme ends shortly afterwards, he turns off the television and turns to his two children:

"Why are *your* teeth so white and healthy? You eat sweets from time to time."

"We brush our teeth every day," Birgit replies confidently.

"That's what the boy on the programme did, too, according to the presenter, and yet his teeth were so bad you could hardly look at them," insists her father.

Mother Renate happens to walk by with a watering can in her hand and explains:

"It's the 'little difference' that makes all the difference! Nowadays, most children often eat sweets at *any time* of the day and then brush their teeth *themselves* from an early age – three times a day, no problem, but mostly poorly and almost always only after their parents have had to remind them several times...

I wanted to spare us all this drama right from the start. That's why, as soon as you got your first teeth, I started sitting you on my lap one by one and brushing your teeth myself, holding you firmly in my arms like a mother. For children, this difficult task is only really mastered at around the age of nine, based on their own body awareness – but nobody wants to admit that! However, because your teeth had been cleaned properly and thoroughly for years, a *single, thorough* cleaning in the evening before bed was sufficient.

This meant that your teeth were protected by the fluoride in the toothpaste during the night, while the normal bacteria in your mouth and the occasional cleansing apple continued to provide protection the next day. You could easily manage a small portion of sweets every day as a snack without your teeth immediately developing cavities."

"Yes, that's true," Pius now confirms, looking seriously at his father. "Birgit and I are allowed to choose something from the sweet cupboard every day *after* we've done our homework, for example, a bar of chocolate or five biscuits, a piece of pear bread or cake, etc.

But *before* we do our homework or during school breaks, Mummy always gives us an apple or another piece of fruit at most, or some vegetables like carrots and cucumber sticks, a slice of bread or sugar-free wholemeal biscuits, and things like that, so that we can concentrate better. We've noticed that sugar doesn't work so well!

And if we do feel like sweets and other treats for our afternoon snack – like other children seem to be sucking on all the time – we both have to buy them *ourselves* with our pocket money. Or we wait until someone gives us sweets for our birthday or Christmas, because you never buy us any, Mummy."

Renate just nods and smiles, prompting Aldo to ask his children with interest:

"And isn't it all terribly awful for you, the way Mummy treats your teeth?"

"No!" Pius replies immediately, and his sister also replies calmly:

"That's just the way it's been since we were born. We don't know anything else, and basically, we don't feel that we're missing anything. We have everything we urgently need!"

"...just *not too much of anything!* " Adds the mother meaningfully. "And that's probably what matters.

Nowadays, in our rich countries, there is *always far too much of everything*. We currently live in a fairy-tale land of milk and honey, where you can buy and eat anything you could possibly want at any time. But surviving here – and with healthy teeth, no less – is not as easy as you might think.

First of all, every single person in this country must learn to *exercise restraint* and say '*no!*' to themselves a thousand times a day, whether in shops or shopping centres, where thousands of beautifully displayed items are waiting to be enjoyed. However, even at home in the kitchen or in front of the television or computer, it is important to choose only sensible things from the wide range available at the right time and disregard everything else. But that takes practice!

The easiest way is if your parents show you from an early age *how little you actually need to be happy*. That's what I've tried to teach you, children, anyway.

In this way, healthy self-restraint and focusing on what is really important will gradually become a casual everyday habit for every child. And then you can confidently stroll through the most tempting food aisles with them – just like we do – and none of them will feel compelled to have all the delicacies.

However, to ensure that *our* natural desire for something special, for 'indulgence' or something sweet, is satisfied, we consciously plan such *exceptions* into our everyday routine – just not too often, so that it remains exciting! But then we enjoy this one exception all the more, with all our hearts, don't we?"

"Exactly!" Pius beams. "That's why we *only* have white bread and a sweet drink on Sundays, while during the week we're quite happy with brown bread and tap water. And in between, you make us oven potato chips at the weekend, which I love so much, Mummy, or we go out for ice cream together in the summer. Yummy!"

"My school friends, on the other hand, "Birgit now recounts eagerly, "all have a freezer at home and can therefore eat ice cream whenever they feel like it. And as I know them now, they actually feel like it *every day* in summer, and their parents don't seem to mind at all.

And chips are always available in most other families, and for many children, a bag of crisps is part of every school break too.

But afterwards, they constantly complain that they are far too fat and urgently need to go on a diet. And they are always terrified of going to the dentist because he is always drilling and filling their teeth. Fortunately, we don't have problems like that!"

"And I sometimes feel really sorry for all the other children, because they've probably never had as much fun with a single strawberry or chocolate ice cream as we do," Pius adds thoughtfully...

A healthy consequence: "Grandma, I'm taking the doll's pram for a walk!" three-and-a-half-year-old Sabine calls from outside the house.

Grandmother Corinne hesitates and asks her little granddaughter:

"Are you sure you want to push it all the way around the pond in front of you? That could be exhausting."

"No, no, Grandma, I can do it myself. I'm a big girl now," replies Sabine proudly, steering her doll's pram towards the car-free dirt track that runs close to the house. "All right," says Corinne, convinced, and the two of them walk peacefully along the reeds for a while.

"Look, Grandma, I can play football with this stone," Sabine beams, pushing a slightly larger stone in front of her with her foot. "Now *you* can take the doll's pram. I can't do that with the stone."

"No, thank you!" the grandmother immediately declines. "It gives me a backache because your doll's pram is much too low for me. But even if it were higher, I wouldn't push it for you because *you* decided to take it with you."

"You're mean!" the little girl whines. "How am I supposed to push the stone if you won't take the doll's pram? We can't just leave it here by the pond, or someone might steal it and take the doll with it. Then it'll be your fault, Grandma." But she remains unperturbed and calmly replies:

"I'm definitely not to blame if something happens to your doll's pram. You know that very well. But you could put the stone in the pram with your doll. Then we'll go for a walk, and when we get home, you can play pushing stones in front of the house for a while."

"No, no, no!" Sabine screams angrily and starts stamping and lashing out. But with a firm grip, the grandmother holds the girl tight and says calmly to her:

"You can rage as much as you want, but I will *not* give in. You wanted to take the doll's pram with you, and you will push it all the way home — with or without a stone, I don't care.

I'm definitely going to keep going, because I want to check out the little forest over there to see if the baby blackbirds we heard chirping in their nest last time have left the nest yet..."

Without saying another word or waiting for a response, Corinne lets go of the little girl and sets off.

Sabine continues to yell after her for a few minutes. However, when her grandmother disappears from view around the next bend in the path without looking back, she hurries to catch up with her doll's pram and the stone inside it.

Toddlers have special needs: "Cool, finally a stay-at-home dad in our neighbourhood! Ilona blurts out as she arrives with her three-year-old son at the busy, large sandpit in the playground. "My name is Ilona, and this is Jimmy."

With these words, she extends her hand to the person she is addressing, who responds with a broad grin and also introduces himself:

"Nice to meet you! My name is Felix, and these are my two children, Janna and Sascha. We moved in five days ago, over there on the third floor."

"I just heard that from my neighbour, yes! And you really are a househusband all week while your wife goes to work? Or is that just a rumour?" Ilona asks bluntly and sits down next to Felix on the bench, while little Jimmy has long since joined the other children, and Janna and Sascha continue to eagerly dig tunnels in the sand.

"No, that's not a rumour," Felix replies, amused. "That's the honest truth! I just do some small IT jobs for my old business now and then, but otherwise I mainly look after the children and the house. As you know, there's never a dull moment."

"Well," Ilona replies slowly, "I don't know exactly, because my husband and I work away from home all week, while Jimmy is wonderfully looked after at my company's crèche and a woman comes to our house twice a week to clean and do the laundry.

I'm only out here in the middle of the week today as an exception because I *had to* take time off to reduce the mountain of overtime that has been piling up for me lately...

But I really wouldn't want to stand at the stove here at home every day, running after the little one, keeping the flat tidy, sitting around at the playground, and all that. You'd go crazy eventually!"

"Do you think so? Do I look like that?" Felix laughs, but then he becomes serious again and asks curiously:

"Doesn't your Jimmy mind having to let you and your husband go out every day – except at the weekend, of course? My two little ones would definitely kick up a fuss if I tried to drop them off somewhere."

"Oh no, you're just saying that!" Ilona says, sounding very worldly. "Jimmy doesn't mind going to nursery every morning at all. He always has playmates there, so he never gets bored."

And your children seem to have adjusted just as easily to the fact that you are the breadwinner for the family, and you, as their father, stay at home with them. So, they would surely not mind being looked after by nice young carers at the nursery during the day, just like Jimmy. You should just give it a try.

Or are you planning to waste away here at home for the next few years?"

"I'm not wasting away here!" Felix protests emphatically and casually bends down to his two-year-old son Sascha to pull back the peak of his cap, which has slipped down over his eyes while he was playing.

"I *enjoy* spending time with my children, whether it's outside, at home, or out and about. And I find all the work I do here every day extremely meaningful. That's what I like about being a househusband! Nothing is pointless idling, like it sometimes was at work. Here, everything I do benefits someone in our family."

I also feel that children of this age are better off being cared for and accompanied by their father and/or mother for several years than growing up in a mixed group of children with constantly changing teachers and interns from birth. I think this allows the relationship between parents and children to become much deeper and more sustainable in the long run.

But of course, everyone has to decide for themselves what is best for their children..."

"The crèche seems to be doing my Jimmy good, as you can see. He's already running around with the others as if he's been here every day, even though he doesn't really know anyone here. He has no problems making friends as a crèche-child and is already asserting himself like a big boy."

"I think that's wonderful," Felix says casually. "But I'm just old-fashioned and believe that small children need a certain amount of low-pressure area at first, so that they can *slowly* get used to the neighbour's children and the big, wide world during their first four or five years away from their familiar family environment. It's brutal to put babies and hop-o'-my-thumbs in nursery for days on end as if they were primary school children who have to cope on their own in a holiday camp with children they don't know at all."

"But, but, Felix!" Ilona shakes her head in disbelief. "I thought that as a modern househusband, you would be an open-minded, intelligent man. But now you come to me with such backwater ideas...!"

Felix can't answer right away because he has to take care of his four-year-old daughter Janna, who is staring in horror at a much bigger boy who has provoked her by throwing sand at her.

After calmly but firmly clarifying the situation with the two children so that they now both know exactly where their territory is and can easily stay within the boundaries, all the children are now happily playing in the sandpit again, working on their various building projects.

When Felix returns to the playground bench, he responds to Ilona's blatant mockery from earlier:

"So, you call my opinion 'backwater ideas'. But you can't mislead me, Ilona. I've thought long and hard about all these issues – as a househusband, I have time for such things! And even if I *were* the only one who wanted to give his young children a certain low-pressure area at first, it wouldn't bother me at all, because I now know exactly what my children *need* and what *isn't* good for them.

For example, just before, it was very important to my two little ones that I was out here with them as a parent and could step in to help if something went wrong."

"You're just coddling your children," replies the neighbour dismissively, "and making them unhealthily dependent on you. My Jimmy, on the other hand, can manage all by himself. Just look!"

Triumphantly, she points diagonally behind her to her little son, who has just angrily pulled a slightly older girl by her clothes off the slide because she wanted to push in. But the girl does not feel she deserves such treatment and slaps the little boy just as angrily across the face.

Deeply offended, Jimmy starts screaming loudly and beats the girl blindly and furiously until she, horrified by such a violent reaction from such a small boy, looks over to Ilona and Felix for help.

"So? Aren't you going to go and talk to them?" Felix asks, bewildered. "They want you to teach them how to handle situations like this better next time."

"Oh, nonsense!" Ilona waves her hand dismissively and turns back to her neighbour. "They'll find a way – even without me – even if they have to knock each other's heads off first!"

"Great!" Felix says ironically and a little disgusted. "You're just leaving your little son out there in the big bad world without any guidance, as if he were already an adult – even though he's only three years old and, as a toddler, still largely dependent on your protection and guidance to learn how to interact peacefully with other children.

You certainly feed him, buy him clothes, give him a bed to sleep in and toys to play with, don't you? Or does he have to organise all that himself...?"

"No, of course not, Felix! Are you crazy? He's far too young for that."

"I see, you can recognise this in these things? But when it comes to interpersonal relationships, as a three-year-old, he should be old enough to figure everything out on his own and get through it by himself?"

"That has nothing to do with it."

"Why not?" Felix insists. "As a toddler, you're not yet able to take care of yourself and need a mother and/or father to help and protect you. That's completely natural at that age!

Or do you think that your Jimmy doesn't need to be protected from sexual overwhelm, dangerous drivers on the road, an aggressive social worker, alcohol or medication lying around – because he'll figure it all out for himself...?"

"No, logically I don't think so, because Jimmy obviously needs us adults for that. *Every single* toddler is overwhelmed by things like that!"

"There you go, I knew it! So you agree with me, Ilona, that small children by nature – and not because we want to coddle them – do not yet have the same needs and abilities as adults and therefore should not be treated or expected to behave in exactly the same way?"

"Yeeeeees! I know what you're getting at, Felix," Ilona admits reluctantly.

"You don't just plant little seedlings in a large meadow and leave them to their own devices, otherwise they'll dry out or be eaten by snails within a few days..."

"Bravo!" Felix praises his neighbour, beaming. "That's exactly what I wanted to say. Your little Jimmy isn't grown up yet and needs you much, much more than you want to admit: for example, to feel safe and secure with you, to be able to ask questions and search for answers together with you in peace, to be able to *learn* all kinds of things about life from you – such as how to solve problems or make peace with other children, where minor and major dangers lurk, how to control yourself without constantly losing your temper, and much more.

There is usually far too much going on in the nursery for the carers to have time for all the little needs of each individual child..."

"But I'm not going to stop working, I'm telling you!" Ilona interjects defiantly — but glances furtively over her shoulder to see if Jimmy and the girl have calmed down. But the two still stand facing each other, hostilely, only now with a little more distance between them. In any case, a solution to the problem seems far from imminent...

Felix pretends not to notice Ilona's new interest in her son's well-being and replies reassuringly:

"It's okay, Ilona! No one is asking you to give up your job completely. But now that you're starting to see your little plant in the right light again and seem to have realised that Jimmy needs you as a mother much more than you thought, I'm sure you'll be a little more caring to him through his toddler life..."

Even going to bed can be exciting: After dinner, during which the three children sat around the large table with their father Rudi for a long time, making up silly rhymes, singing, and laughing a lot, it is now time to slowly go to bed. But none of the children really feel like it.

But suddenly, seven-year-old Marco has an idea and asks the cheerful family group:

"Shall we play the 'take your clothes off' game again today?"

Before their parents can even open their mouths, Fabian and Sandra, the two younger children, shout enthusiastically:

"Oh, yes!"

And all three of them run over to the playroom, where they place their wooden children's chairs next to each other in the middle of the room, stand on them, and wait eagerly for Frieda, their mother.

Shortly afterwards, she sits cross-legged on the carpet facing her children and, smiling but without saying a word, begins her beloved game:

As soon as she claps her hands briefly, the children have to jump down from their chairs immediately – that's the simple task. Then they quickly climb back up, turn to their mother, and jump again when she claps her hands next, and so on and so forth.

Sometimes Frieda just pretends to clap for fun. Anyone who loses their balance because they were already about to jump, even though there was no clapping sound, has to take off one of their clothes as a forfeit.

Over time, however, the mother claps her hands at increasingly shorter intervals, so that Fabian, Marco, and three-year-old Sandra inevitably hop down faster and climb back up again until they make mistakes more and more often and have to take off more items of clothing.

Of course, all three children try their hardest not to accidentally jump off their chairs at the wrong moment, but at some point their legs almost give way, so soon they are all laughing and gasping for breath as they reach for their pyjama bottoms and, shortly afterwards, their tops.

Now they are really tired, just hanging around and ready to brush their teeth without a fight. They see this as a real rest and don't make a fuss at all, but lie down in their beds clean and content after a short time.

After Rudi and Frieda have said 'good night' to each of them, the day inevitably draws to a close. But the three children understand that their parents want some time to themselves. And besides, they have long since discovered that when you are a child, you can imagine the most glorious things or wonderful stories before falling asleep in the dark, until your eyes eventually close by themselves...

Counterproductive threats: "If you don't behave yourself right now, you'll go to bed without any dinner," a mother threatens her young son for the third time in a restaurant because he keeps standing on the expensive leather upholstery of his chair with his shoes on and jumping up and down wildly.

A few tables away, eleven-year-old Peter nudges his father Anton and says quietly to him:

"But it doesn't seem to bother the little one much when his mum keeps threatening him only..."

Anton replies with a smile, just as quietly:

"They've probably been playing this power game for a long time and think that's how you *have to* treat each other..."

"This mother could have such a wonderful life!" Peter sighs sympathetically. 'But no, she keeps repeating that the boy should sit down nicely, otherwise... But that just provokes him to do exactly what she has forbidden him to do.'

"You might be right," Anton remarks, as Peter continues to ponder in a subdued tone:

"You know, Dad, that's how I would react if you spoke to me like that. When someone threatens to punish me without explaining why, it makes me want to disobey them even more."

"What would you have said to the boy as his mother to stop him ruining the expensive upholstery with his shoes?" Anton now wants to know from his son.

"I would have explained to him immediately that the restaurant owner had paid a lot of money to buy these beautiful chairs for his guests and that the leather upholstery would quickly get holes in it from the hard heels of his shoes, meaning that it would have to be repaired at great expense. That's why he should kindly sit down again so that the chair doesn't break.

And to show that I really meant it, I would have picked up the little one myself and sat him down a little roughly. That's what you always did to me, Dad, when you wanted me to understand something and obey.

But so that I wouldn't be angry with you afterwards, you always praised me for something I had done right. Once you even said to me that I could easily be taken to a restaurant even though I was only four, because I could sit quietly in my chair like an adult. Of course, I was very proud of that at the time and would never have wanted to disappoint you, Dad."

"You mean my short, clear 'why' explanations and praise helped you behave better in public much more than if I had constantly threatened you with punishment?"

"Yes, definitely," Peter replies confidently and takes another sip of apple juice from his glass.

Then Anton suddenly thinks of something:

"Perhaps the President of the United States should also deal with the President of North Korea in this manner if he once again decides to conduct senseless nuclear tests just to prove to everyone how powerful his country is. But so far, Western presidents have unfortunately only responded with threats and sanctions – just like the mother over there – and have thus achieved nothing more than making even the new president of North Korea act like a defiant little boy who refuses to listen to anything America has to say.

But if the American presidents were to change their behaviour and explain to the North Korean people exactly *why* the rest of the world disapproves of firing nuclear bombs, and if they were to praise the country instead..."

But Peter interrupts his father sceptically:

"What praise? Maybe there's nothing there to praise..."

"But that's exactly how the mother over there feels about her little boy, Peter. But that can't be true! There's *always* something you can praise another person for," Anton says with conviction. "You just have to look closely.

Yesterday, for example, the news showed a picture taken from space at night. It showed the countless lights of free South Korea, while North Korea was almost completely dark.

North Korea is therefore saving an enormous amount of energy and not simply allowing it to be wasted in the night, as all the highly industrialised countries around it do – including us in our own country. *For that*, we should praise the North Koreans, don't you think?"

Surprised, Peter just nods and continues listening to his father.

"Of course, it's cruel how the military leadership lives in luxury while the normal population is partly starving. And every single one of them is expected to revere the president's deceased father like a god, even though it was actually his macho missile tests that brought about all the import restrictions and misery of the rural population in the first place. But if you say something like that out loud and try to defend yourself, you are quickly sent to a re-education camp..."

But when it comes to environmental protection, the North Korean people are way ahead of us – simply because they *cannot* live in abundance like we do. But even if their energy efficiency is not voluntary, all these people should at least be praised for their environmentally friendly frugality and held up as role models for the rest of the world – in all possible media.

Such praise would certainly warm the heart of the young North Korean president and might even enable him to listen again when people try to show him that his nuclear missile tests are causing nothing but harm and could destroy the foundations of life for all of us.

And he could then put the money he saves towards feeding his exemplary, environmentally friendly fellow citizens, since he claims to love them more than anything else. In any case, *this approach* would certainly be more effective in global politics than constantly repeating threats that only provoke opposition."

"Or to that..." Peter says meaningfully, nodding slightly towards the mother and son. There, the annoyed woman is roughly pulling her boy off the chair and dragging him away, while she angrily hisses: "I'm never going to a restaurant with you again..."

Mobile phones?! "What do you think about mobile phones?" thirty-year-old Silke suddenly asks, turning to her two colleagues, with whom she has been sitting for a while on a bench at the edge of the park, in the shade of some wonderful old trees, while on this sunny afternoon all their children are running around and playing on the various playground equipment.

Sabine looks at Silke in amazement and asks:

"Are you already planning to buy your son Beni a mobile phone, that you're asking us about it? He's only starting second grade after the holidays."

"Why not?" Gabrielle interjects calmly, before Silke has a chance to respond. "Our girls got their first mobile phones when they were in kindergarten. It worked out well because they could always call me if they had a problem."

"But they didn't know any letters or numbers back then," Sabine interjects, confused.

"That's what saved numbers are for," Gabrielle defends herself. "You press a certain button – you know it by heart! – and you've got your mum or whoever else on the phone, and you can tell them whatever's on your mind. I think it's great!"

"But there is a risk that children will never really manage to become independent because they can always pick up the phone and ask you what to do instead of thinking for themselves and learning to solve problems on their own," Sabine points out sceptically, before continuing:

"In any case, I much preferred to be around our children as much as possible during their early years so that they could learn everything they could about the world and people directly from me. That way, by the time they started kindergarten, they were already able to think and act quite independently and responsibly without having to call home every few minutes."

"Our children don't do that either," Gabrielle protests indignantly. "They only call me when they really need me. But I can ask them where they are

at any time. That has often saved me hours of searching around the neighbourhood."

"And what if they lie to you when they get older because they simply don't want to be monitored by you anymore?" Sabine asks provocatively. "For example, what if they dutifully tell you on their mobile phones that they are busy doing their homework with their friend, when in fact they are 'hanging out' with some guys in town... What then?"

"I don't think my two girls would betray me like that," Gabrielle replies confidently, crossing her arms in front of her body as if to emphasise her point. "Our relationship is far too good for that."

"That may well be," Sabine concedes. "I just wanted to say that a mobile phone does not offer absolute security. Even by phone, you can't always keep track of your children everywhere. That's just the way it is!

Shouldn't we, as parents, therefore focus more on teaching our children how to take responsibility for their actions reliably and independently *before they* start using mobile phones? That's the only way we can truly rely on our children, even when we have no idea where they are."

"Yes, I think that's a good consideration," Silke finally joins in the discussion she has started. "If our children can develop solid ground under their feet at home from an early age and learn what is valid and allowed where, where real dangers lurk, and how to help themselves in the event of problems, then there really won't be any need for a 'cell phone mother' in the background later on. At least that's what I'm going to try with my Beni..."

But there's another question on the tip of my tongue: if, despite everything, my husband decides that our son finally needs his own cell phone because it's simply part of a schoolchild's standard equipment these days, isn't there a great risk that he'll be terrorized by other children via his cell phone? You hear about this kind of thing all the time, about nasty, derogatory bullying text messages, about filmed violence against classmates, about downloaded porn videos and the like..."

"I'm sure he wouldn't have anything like that to worry about in lower grade," Gabrielle waves her hand reassuringly. "In any case, I've never heard of it in our district. It's only in the upper classes that such spectres occasionally appear in waves in the individual school buildings, as I know from neighbors. But then it's just important to react correctly."

"And what does that mean exactly?"

"Well, the teachers here have apparently been making nasty cell phone jokes a topic in class for a few years now, every time they hear about it, and denounce such psychologically abusive behavior in class discussions as completely uncool and simply mean and reprehensible, so that no one can boast about it to the others."

In addition, all those who have been harassed or deliberately frightened by their cell phone are officially requested to contact their teachers as soon as possible so that they can work together to combat the growth of such excesses. Where teachers, social pedagogues, and pupils do not look the other way, but take immediate action, talk about these issues, and jointly draw up and consistently enforce rules of conduct in the school building, such vile territorial violations by cocky classmates can be nipped in the bud.

But for our younger children, none of this is an issue at all yet. They'd much rather play all kinds of games on their cell phones or text each other in incomprehensible abbreviations about who's meeting whom after school..."

"But then you're excluded if you don't have a cell phone," Silke now thinks a little worriedly.

"Yes, that would be possible," admits Gabrielle. "It's just like branded jeans or branded shoes: If you're wearing the wrong thing or can't be reached on a cell phone, you'll soon look stupid in front of others and will inevitably be ostracized and bullied over time. That's how far we've come these days...!"

"But no, Gabrielle! That's not true," Sabine now corrects angrily. "Even in fourth and fifth grade, our Josef and Viviane still don't have a cell phone, and yet they are well integrated into their classmates' groups. We also only buy brand-name clothes if one of the children wants to afford a trendy item with their pocket money or birthday savings.

During the school break, they don't necessarily stand around pompously with the cool-dressed cell phone owners and stare at their screens, but prefer to play football or basketball as happily as a sandboy with their friends on the sports field next door. That's still possible these days - and much healthier anyway!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Silke sighs with relief. "I thought you'd inevitably be drawn into this modern maelstrom and would hardly be able to resist it. But if *your* children are strong enough to go their own way..."

"Only thanks to the way we educate them," Sabine reminds her colleague.

"Children must first learn to develop this inner strength through 'natural accompaniment' before they can let any derogatory remarks and attempts at humiliation from their classmates bounce off them without batting an eyelid.

But as soon as they manage to do this, they quickly get people to let them go because it becomes too boring to pester them, as they are not expected to react at all. As a result, these 'fashion terrorists' look for another victim in the schoolyard, one who is immediately impressed by all their attacks and adapts to their demands submissively - even when it comes to cell phones..."

"It's not so easy to get through school in one piece these days," Silke says thoughtfully. "But at least I have you colleagues to keep me up to date if I ask a stupid question," she smiles faithfully at the other two.

But Sabine and Gabrielle immediately contradict her:

"That wasn't a stupid question!"

And the latter immediately adds:

"Because you wanted to know what we think about cell phones, I now see the whole thing a little more critically and even plan to discuss this topic with my husband and our girls at the family dinner table..."

"And it occurred to me," Sabine now explains candidly, "that I will probably buy our daughter a mobile phone after all, in case she wants to ride like her older cousins, because it's really not safe to ride alone across the countryside for hours on end. How quickly something can happen, and how jolly glad you are these days when you can call for help with your mobile phone, even when you are far away from civilisation.

Even when hiking in the mountains, I recently thought that it might be smarter to take a mobile phone with me than to go without...

So, as you can see, I'm not categorically against these things either!

"I'm glad to hear that," Gabrielle grins with a pleasant surprise. "I thought you were a 'militant' mobile phone opponent, Sabine!

I see this in my brother, who is a musician: he can't do without his mobile phone in his job because he has to coordinate with so many colleagues and concert organisers to keep track of all the performances of various music groups during the week. And how could the others possibly reach him in his soundproof practice room, where he practises for hours on end?"

"Yes, that's a really good example of how a mobile phone can undoubtedly have advantages..."

"And even when I'm out with other people or we're having a lively discussion in a restaurant," Silke continues eagerly, "and we just can't seem to come to a conclusion because no one in the group can answer a particular question, I think it's wonderful when someone has their mobile phone with them and can look it up on the Internet for the rest of us right there and then..."

"...But that's not really essential for survival," Sabine replies slowly, grimacing. "You can't exactly call it a basic need, can you? We used to have an encyclopaedia at home and that was enough."

"Sure, you're right," Gabrielle replies candidly. "But a mobile phone with all its possibilities is still fun to have! I really enjoy the technical achievements of our modern age and use them to my advantage wherever I can – but that doesn't make it any easier to exercise restraint, of course!"

"At least you're aware of it," Sabine says appreciatively. "That's a good start. And you're willing to talk to your children about mobile phone use

and peer pressure at school. This will certainly reduce the likelihood of your mobile phones suddenly taking control of your entire family and suppressing them, when they are actually only supposed to be of service to you..."

"That's why I'm planning to attend a course for parents on 'mobile phones'," Silke now reports. "As far as I know, it will be offered by the school after the autumn holidays.

There, we mums and dads will be better informed about the possibilities and dangers of mobile phones so that we can be more helpful to our children than we have been up to now, when we ourselves hardly understand the technology, let alone keep our personal use of mobile phones under control cleverly. I'm certainly looking forward to it!"

"To what?" asks seven-year-old Beni suddenly, stopping in his tracks and throwing himself down next to his mother on the free end of the park bench, while the other children, having had enough of playing high-catch, join their mothers with red cheeks and tousled hair. "What were you talking about just now...?"

Missing information: "So, Nico, you dust all the surfaces on the furniture with the cloth and Urs takes the vacuum cleaner for the floor," the school caretaker instructs his two fourteen-year-old charges sternly.

After they have cleaned the third classroom almost wordlessly with combined efforts and are moving on to the next one with their cleaning utensils, Mr. Meier suddenly asks the boys:

"And what have you done to deserve having to work for me for three Wednesday afternoons?"

Nico replies readily:

"Last Saturday, we were at the shopping centre and decided to scare people for fun because we couldn't think of anything more interesting to do. We just wanted to see if we could make someone scream like they do in horror films. Unfortunately, we were so successful that an elderly woman collapsed unconscious right in front of us because her heart stopped from the shock. Fortunately, she survived the heart attack..."

"Have you all lost your minds?" Mr. Meier exclaims in horror.

But Urs defends himself indignantly:

"How were we supposed to know that there are people who faint when they are startled?"

"Don't you have parents to teach you such things?" Mr. Meier asks angrily.

"Surely you must have realised at some point that old people often have weak hearts and need to be treated gently, and that most people hate

being frightened for no reason anyway. That's the minimum general knowledge you should have at your age!"

"Of course we have parents," Nico replies somewhat meekly, "but my old folks think I have to find out for myself how life works. It wouldn't be their job to teach me all that. Besides, they're much more interested in fine wines, exclusive furniture, and gyms than in what I'm doing and learning – or not learning, for that matter. They call it 'education to be independent'..."

"That's a fine way to bring up a child!" the caretaker fulminates, but he still wants to hear what Urs has to say.

Urs now explains candidly:

"My parents both work all day in the factory – ever since I can remember, actually. So from an early age, I was always at the nursery during the week until the evening and later at the after-school care centre at school. But as far as I know, there was never any mention of not scaring old people because they might die. But maybe I just didn't notice it in the general hustle and bustle of the nursery..."

"But you don't seem to have much compassion in general if you find it funny to scare other people so much that they scream. You're not little children anymore, for whom this is still an innocent game, because the people playing know full well that they're supposed to be scared and are just pretending to be completely surprised."

"In horror films, it's perfectly normal to be deliberately frightened all the time," Urs now protests, "and in an extremely brutal way – by adults!"

Mr. Meier grabs his head in disbelief and groans:

"But that's no reality, guys, it's just rehearsed theatre for the film! None of the actors are really scared, because everyone knows the script. And viewers who subsequently watch such a film on television or at the cinema decide entirely of their own free will to allow themselves to be shocked by the horrific scenes.

But you scared your fellow men at the shopping centre without asking them first if they were okay with it – and that's where the fun stops!

Just imagine you are going about your business unsuspectingly, like all those people in the shopping centre, perhaps thinking hard about whether you have enough money for this or that, or you are sad because a loved one has recently died, or you are an elderly person trying to find a pace that will allow you to walk without your sore knee hurting too much, and so on.

And then suddenly two birdbrains like you come along and completely distract you from your thoughts, as if the end of the world were nigh. This is no longer about fun, but is simply a bottomless act of cruelty and heartlessness towards strangers.

I, for one, would have been terribly angry with you if you had done that to *me*, boys. I can tell you that! Or did your poor victims smile at you kindly

after you scared them, I wonder?" the caretaker asks the young offenders insistently.

The two just shake their heads silently and look down at the floor, embarrassed.

"We never thought about what would go through people's minds," Nico mutters to himself, then suddenly turns on the vacuum cleaner and starts vacuuming the next classroom with determination – so that no one will notice that he got teary-eyed...

Natural needs – unnatural needs: Severina wakes up for the second time that night because her three-year-old daughter is crying in the nursery next door. She quietly gets out of bed and slips into her slippers.

"Don't let Gina wrap you around her little finger!" her husband, Tobias, grumbles behind her in bed, tossing and turning from one side to the other. "But she's ill," Severina explains in a whisper. "It's understandable that she's calling for me after a bad fever dream. Or the fever could have risen again. In any case, I have to go and check on her.

Just sleep on! You have another tough day ahead of you tomorrow. And I don't mind getting up again. It's my job, after all!"

"By the way, about last night," Severina says to her husband again at breakfast. "Were you jealous of the little one because I had to take care of her several times during the night?"

"No, what are you thinking?" Tobias waves aside and swallows the bite of bread in his mouth. "I was just afraid it might become a habit for us, you having to get up two or three times a night just because Gina notices that you appear in a flash when she cries for you."

"Oh no, Tobias! Sick children aren't that calculating! She just needs a little more attention from me right now because she's not feeling well. I think that's perfectly normal."

"But you are so kind and attentive to her that you might not be able to stop reading her every wish from her lips even when she has long since recovered..."

"You're not entirely wrong in your fears," Severina now admits. "When I brought one of the children tea and rusks to bed for a few days, shaken out pillows and blankets countless times, put cold cloths on their foreheads, administered medication, aired the room every few hours, gathered simple toys to entertain them, and sat by their bedside singing a song or telling a story from time to time, then I have to consciously make sure I don't miss the point when all this is no longer necessary."

However, during such periods of illness, I constantly try to distinguish clearly whether these are real, *natural* needs that our sick child wants me to satisfy at that moment, or whether, after a while, they escalate into harmful, completely nonsensical desires because they no longer know exactly what they really need and what they don't.

As a mother, it is my responsibility to be a wise, leading animal for my sick child, keeping an overview of the situation *without* becoming overwhelmed with pity for the suffering little one. This means that during the illness, I can easily allow a little more television than usual, perhaps a sweet treat now and then, or sitting by the bed for a long time chatting. But once the child is healthy again, I have to make sure I put the brakes on in good time so that unhealthy exaggerations don't creep in unnoticed..."

"That's good, then," Tobias replies reassuringly, smiling and placing his hand on Severina's arm. "I just didn't want to suddenly have an arduous child like my colleague at work. Apparently he hasn't been able to sleep properly at night for two years because his little son has been keeping him and his wife awake every night since he suffered from a painful intestinal disease as a three-month-old baby. Meanwhile, he has long since made a full recovery, but he can't sleep after three in the morning – because his parents gloriously make an effort around him as soon as he makes a sound..."

"Yes, in this case, I understand your concern, of course," Severina says indulgently. "But you don't have to worry about that with me, because I'm well aware of the risk – especially since my grandfather was seriously ill for a long time and had to be cared for in the guest bed at our home.

When I was a child, my mother took me aside and explained that we should all be very understanding of my grandfather's suffering and pain and do certain things for him out of kindness. But we shouldn't let his endless wishes consume or drain us, because otherwise we family members would soon have no strength left to continue caring for him at home – and then Grandpa wouldn't have benefited from it either..."

"You're right, Severina! I should know that you don't spoil our children, otherwise you would have been indulging Frederick's every whim when he was an only child before Gina was born. But you never did that.

You were always there for him when he simply needed you to meet his genuine, *natural* needs as a child. But you never imposed yourself on him in an unnatural or excessive way – as modern 'helicopter parents' often do when they want to focus entirely on their child or finally have time for their children on their days off after work..."

Most of the time, these mums and dads just want to do everything right, want to give their 'little treasures' and 'little princesses' as much as possible, and so they end up hovering over their little ones like a

helicopter, making sure they don't miss out on anything and that nothing can possibly happen to them.

Such 'one-and-only' children are constantly *the centre* of attention at home, on the go, or when visiting others. Their wishes are immediately fulfilled, every difficulty is removed from their path and everything possible is organised to ensure that the little darling feels comfortable, never has to cry and can soon become the proudly presented 'super child'..."

"Parents always want 'only the best' for their children!" Severina interjects ironically, twisting her mouth.

"Of course! I feel exactly the same way," Tobias replies, but he is completely serious. "I, too, never intended to give our children anything less than the very best treatment. But I've known for a long time that pampering is *not* the best thing for a child, because it prevents them from developing inner strength and genuine self-confidence.

Children who are carried around on people's hands tend *to sound* rather pompous, sophisticated, and demanding – but unfortunately, this is purely due to a feeling of weakness, because no one wanted to respond to their *natural* needs, but instead preferred to respond to their demanding and actually completely *unnatural* needs. But this pampering means that these children are unable to develop healthily on the inside, instead remaining stuck at the level of a toddler, soft and loud-mouthed."

"But this seems to have become really 'in' in recent decades," Severina nods thoughtfully. "Never before have so many children and young people succumbed to fads or addictions that stem entirely from unnatural needs. And likewise, never before have so many children been exploited by the unnatural needs of adults, whether through parental desire for recognition, 'over-supporting attempts' or even 'well-meaning' paedophile abuse..."

It seems that our society is becoming less and less interested in the genuine, ancient natural needs of children – and meanwhile, many children themselves are no longer aware of what they actually need and what exactly they are missing in their 'paradisiacal' childhood life.

Not that I want to blame anyone for this, because I'm sure all parents do their best to raise their children. But I just feel sorry for all the modern toddlers, children and teenagers who are not getting what they desperately need for their healthy development: For example, warmth and security in a simple, happy and peaceful everyday life, where you may *not* have everything, but where you have the same mother and/or father and the same siblings or neighbour children around you every day – for many years!

That's why I try to be there for our children every day in this way – sometimes a little more intensively when they are ill, then back to normal casually, as soon as they are healthy again.

As a mother, I am always within reach for them, but I don't hover over them like an eagle or a helicopter nonstop. Instead, I casually go about my housework and observe them out of the corner of my eye so that I can sense how they are feeling. I also don't remove obstacles from their path, but rather *show* them from an early age how they can deal with them *themselves* and tackle hurdles courageously and independently, so that they feel genuinely strong and capable afterwards.

Besides, I don't just give in to Gina and Frederick's demands anyway – since, as their 'natural accompaniment' guiding animal, I don't make any unnatural demands of them myself. But we can talk about their wishes and needs at any time, look for meaningful solutions together that are good for everyone (including me!), and explore all the many facets of life in our ordinary surroundings with curiosity, etc.

And we don't even have to spend a lot of money to do it! In our everyday lives, we usually get by with what is just there. All it takes is a little imagination and time. But if our children do have a special wish, then perhaps we can make it come true together during the holidays – or they can save up their pocket money for weeks on end from an early age...

Pampering looks different, doesn't it?"

"Of course!" Tobias beams. "I'm very happy about that, too, Severina. I can't imagine bringing home money all the time and then having to watch you and the children waste it on nonsense, and then having to put up with two spoilt little brats who do nothing but complain and demand things from me after work!

But luckily, I don't have to worry about that with you, as I now realise. With you, it's really only the *genuine* needs of our children that count, but these are all the more important!

This is evident every time we go shopping with the children. In what other family does everyone constantly ask themselves, fully conscious: 'Do I really *need* this and that and that too...?' And then most of the beautifully displayed but unnecessary items remain on the shelves because we only take our *natural* needs seriously and only buy what we really need at that moment.

I am extremely grateful to you for still having this attitude toward life, my darling! I really mean it!

And - what do you think? Shouldn't you go and check on our poor, sick Gina girl...?"

Discretion assured: "Dad, what did you discuss with Nathan earlier when I was still in the playroom?" Six-year-old Silvia wants to know.

"He had a very vivid dream last night," Franz replies truthfully, "and we wanted to find out together what the characters in the dream were trying to tell him."

"What did Nathan dream about?" Silvia persists, snuggling up to her father like a cat.

But Franz refuses to be charmed and explains firmly:

"I can't tell you that, you know that, child. Dreams are private because they reveal the most hidden corners of our soul. It takes courage and trust to let someone see into your innermost being and to be willing to talk about it at all. That's why I always promise you children that I'll keep everything to myself when you tell me your dreams. And of course I'll stick to that now. Do you understand?"

"Of course, Dad! I'm glad you don't tell anyone about my dreams either.

But you know what? Actually, I could just ask Nathan myself if he wants to tell me about his dream. Maybe this time he won't mind."

"Good idea, Silvia. Go for it!" Franz encourages his little daughter and watches her with a smile as she hurries off down the hall...

"Nathan, will you tell me about your dream from last night, or is it a secret?" Silvia asks her big brother innocently as he gets his school bag ready for the next day in his room.

"That one dream is really secret," he replies casually. "But if you want, I can tell you another dream of mine – like a bedtime story, without any interpretation or anything."

"Oh yes!" Silvia exclaims enthusiastically and immediately sits down on Nathan's large beanbag. "And afterwards, I'll tell you one of my dreams – a really bad, dangerous one...!"

Keeping in touch: "Do you want to keep walking or should we turn back?" Gustav asks his children after a long exploration of the neighbouring village.

"I'd like to go to the church over there. We could rest there and then go home," Clemens, the eldest, suggests.

"Yes, that's a good idea," five-year-old Renato agrees, and little Mirja enthusiastically starts running ahead along the dirt track in that direction. 'Lucky I brought the pram,' the father thinks, smiling to himself. 'The little one would hardly make it home on her own two little feet...'

"Here we are!" Gustav says five minutes later, when everyone has arrived in front of the small church. "Shall we go in for a moment?"

The children nod unanimously and quietly follow their father into the cool room.

Renato whispers reverently:

"How beautiful it looks – with all those candles!"

"Yes, I also love it every time," Gustav replies, also in a whisper. "Come on, let's sit at the front on a bench. Then you can see everything properly."

"Where is God now?" asks Mirja, who is just under three years old, as quietly as she can.

"He's everywhere," Clemens remarks, who is sitting next to her, "not just here. But here in church, you can feel him better somehow, because there are no distractions and everything reminds you of God."

The three children now look around quietly, devoutly absorbing the mysterious atmosphere.

After a while, Mirja turns to her father, noticing how he is sitting with his hands folded, staring silently ahead. Curious, she asks him:

"Are you talking to God now?"

"Yes, exactly!" Gustav replies quietly. "To talk to God, I don't even have to say anything out loud, as you've noticed. It's enough for me to *think* something - and God hears me. And just as silently, I hear God's answer inside me.

Try it yourself!"

Mirja leans back in the bench and also looks ahead, completely focused. Then suddenly her whole face lights up.

"Do you know what I just said to God, Daddy?" she whispers eagerly. 'I said to him: 'Thank you for always watching over me, dear God.' And then I also told him about the lollipop that Mummy brought home yesterday and how sooooo good it tasted..."

Truly free!: "Hello, Jasmin, what are you doing right now?" Vera inquires over the phone to her daughter, who has been living in her own flat for two years.

"You won't believe it, Mummy," Jasmin laughs on the other end of the line.

"I'm baking star-shaped cinnamon cookies – in July! I just felt like it. There was no stopping me."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that!" Vera replies with a grin. "So my parenting methods are still working?"

"Of course!" Jasmin replies cheerfully. "I still know that I am completely free in my personal territory and can therefore bake Christmas cookies in July if I want to, even if no one else has thought of it. I'm not hurting anyone, I'm not trespassing on anyone else's territory, I'm just exercising my freedom in *my own* territory."

My colleagues think I'm far too well-behaved and conformist because I never wear flashy clothes or carry a trendy handbag, even though I've long since earned enough money to do so. But I'm not interested in things like that.

And since they all know that I'm going to quit my job in a few months because of my pregnancy and become a full-time mother, they don't understand the world anymore. They fear that I won't be able to stand up for my feminist rights and that my boyfriend will pressure me into giving up my freedom for the sake of our child. But it is my own, completely *free* choice to act this way."

"Not everyone understands 'freedom' in the same way, Jasmin."

"Yes, you're right, Mummy. But *our* family's idea of 'freedom' seems to be extremely rare. At least, all the advertising posters in our town tell a very different story. For example, people are persuaded that they will find great freedom by smoking the right brand of cigarettes, even though this only makes them physically *dependent* – i.e. unfree – and, over time, *forces* them to spend a lot of money on this lack of freedom...

Or there are now posters that say, 'I want a new sofa' or something similar, as if you only had to shout out your wishes like a whining child in order for them to come true. But a small loan makes it possible without having to save up for a long time. And this is what is referred to as 'modern freedom'. However, the posters make no mention whatsoever of the fact that you *have to* pay off overpriced instalments for months afterwards...

Nice freedom, isn't it?"

"Just let them be!' Vera says calmly. "If they all want to kid themselves, that's their decision. We both know that *true* freedom only exists where you're *not* tied to anything.

You probably remember Socrates, who is supposed to have said: 'The less you need, the freer you are'."

"Of course, Mummy! That's what I think too. And life is much more fun anyway if you're not so demanding and concentrate on the essentials.

Recently, I suddenly feared that with this attitude, I might fall into the dangerous principle of exclusion that you once told me about. In doing so, you end up cutting all sorts of things out of your life just because you dislike almost everything – until you end up as miserable as sin and mentally blocked...

But then I realised that it's something completely different to concentrate on the essentials and simply leave out everything *superfluous*. In this way, you are by no means unhappy, but rather *content* and *happy* with what you have, even if it is very little and others would call you 'poor' and pity you.

For example, I am already looking forward to next autumn, when I will join Xaver on a sunny day to walk across the harvested fields and collect the potatoes that have been left behind, which nowadays are simply left to rot. And then we'll both make a little campfire right there on the spot, like they used to do in the old days, especially during wartime, and roast a few of the carelessly discarded potatoes in the hot embers. You can't imagine, Mummy, how unique such a simple meal tastes in the middle of a stubble field! I have no idea why most other people prefer to eat in fancy restaurants when you can treat yourself to something as delicious as this potato feast in the great outdoors in this country... "

Final thought:

If every person in this world – whether baby, child, teenager, adult or elderly person – were shown in a friendly way how to interact with others *in a genuinely peaceful* manner while still getting their rights, then all disputes, wars and terrorist attacks would inevitably die out at some point...

Natural accompaniment is my own personal, newly composed quintessence of several existing world views and my own thoughts and conclusions about them.

If you are also interested in **the original views of the authors* and other creators*** who have inspired me, you will find names, publications, book titles, publishers, specialist fields**, philosophies, biographies, TV programmes, CD series, training opportunities, addresses, and further information on the topics discussed on the Internet.

***Authors/Creators:** Christa Meves, Ernst Aeppli, Carl Gustav Jung, Verena Kast, Walter Odermatt, Elisabeth Lukas, Jesus Messiah/Christ (New Testament), Ross Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Florianne Koechlin, Fred Rai, Thomas Gordon, Oliver Sacks, Pierre Teilard de Chardin, Chiara Lubich, Joyce Meyer, Walter Nigg, Monika Renz, Helga Anton, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Anton and Michaela Styger, Anton Lorber, Jerry B. Jenkins, God (creator of everything) and many more (see bibliography).

****Subject areas:** 'Education', '(Depth) Psychology', 'Relationships', 'Perception', 'Life Stories', 'Developments', 'Everyday life' (today/in the past/worldwide), 'History of peoples', 'Applied research', 'Biology/Physics/Chemistry/Astronomy', 'World views', 'Religions', 'Jesus', 'Trust in God/Catechesis', 'The afterlife', 'Dreams/Symbolism/Fairy tales', etc.

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***Territory rule: Everyone is completely free within their own territory, but may not enter another person's personal territory without permission.

About me

Even as a child, I happily and artlessly wanted nothing more than to live in peace with everyone around me, to have children of my own one day, be able to help others with their problems, find time to write and, along the way, learn as much as possible about the world, life, and people.

And as unbelievable as it may sound, all my childhood dreams have come true in wonderful, often completely unexpected ways throughout my life!

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed in any way: above all to my husband, our children, our families, including those who have passed away, our friends and acquaintances, and all the strangers we met along the way – and, of course, to God, our inventor!