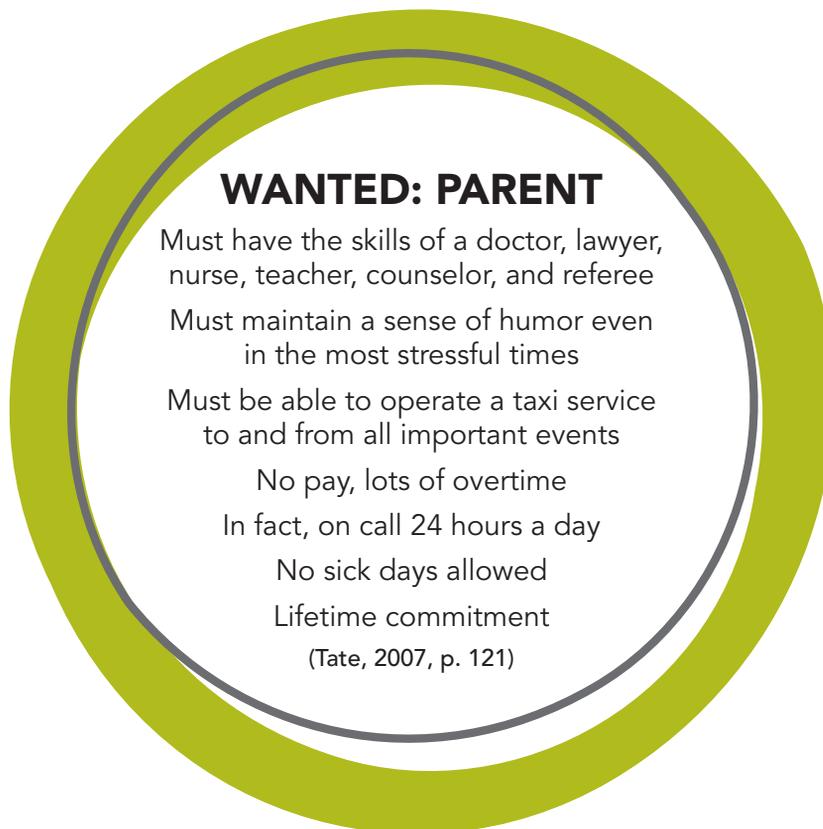


Introduction

What if the following advertisement appeared in your local paper:

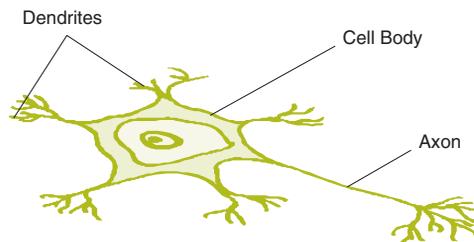


If this ad recruiting people to become parents appeared in the paper, would anyone ever apply? Yet parents are asked to fulfill these responsibilities and many more each and every day. More than 30 years of being a wife and mother to three children has taught me one thing: being a good parent is one of the hardest jobs on the face of the earth. With negative role models abounding, violence and negativity in the media increasing, and our face-to-face communication diminishing, the job of a parent appears to

be getting more difficult each year. Yet it is one of the most important and rewarding jobs one can undertake and it is absolutely crucial that it be done well!

PARENTS AS DENDRITE GROWERS

A baby is born with approximately one hundred billion neurons, or memory cells. In fact, in utero, each fetus has more than one hundred billion neurons, but some are pruned away, or discarded, prior to birth. At the end of every neuron are connections called dendrites. Every time the human brain learns something new, it grows a new dendrite. Messages are passed from one neuron to another as those messages travel from the cell body, down the axon, across the synapse, or space between the two neurons, and into the dendrite of the next neuron. (See the diagram below.)



Many parents have the attitude that it is the school's responsibility to be the primary educator of their children while they play a minor, although important, supporting role (Glasgow & Whitney, 2009). Actually, we know that the most rapid period of growth for cells in the human brain is 0 to 4 years of age. That would make a parent a child's first and best teacher. Parents as well as teachers are *dendrite growers*, since every time they enable their children to learn something new, they help them to grow new dendrites and increase their brain power.

During my 37 years in education, I have seen numerous examples of children whose parents implemented the practices in this book and who, regardless of race, religion, or socioeconomic status, produced children who were equipped for success not only in school but in life. Yet many other parents simply don't know what to do nor are they familiar with the practices essential for raising successful offspring. Am I a perfect parent? Not by any stretch of the imagination. But I have managed to raise three

well-adjusted and respectful children who, I am proud to say, have become wonderful adults and two of the three are great parents themselves. The other one does not yet have children.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book is divided into two major parts. The first part deals with what parents should be doing from birth on to prepare their children to lead successful lives. It is a compilation of what we are learning about brain research and selected effective practices from several different programs designed to make one an effective person as well as an effective parent. The second major part shares brain-compatible strategies for increasing the academic achievement of your children and designates ways that you can prepare your children to be successful in school and, ultimately, in whatever career path they undertake.

The format of this book is similar to that of the five bestsellers in the *Worksheets* series I have written. The first part of each chapter will define the recommended practice in a simple and brain-friendly way and will share current research from the fields of psychology and education regarding the rationale for using the practice. The second part in each chapter will provide numerous examples of ways you and your children can use the practice. The last page in each chapter asks that you reflect on the practice and how you may be able to personally apply it in your home through an *action plan*. Remember that it takes approximately 21 days or 28 times to make a behavior a habit. So the action steps that you identify should be practiced continuously. It is my hope that by the time you complete this book, you will not only know more of what to do and how to do it but will also develop an action plan of specific steps for improving your individual parenting skills.

The final part of the book contains a *contract* that I am asking you to sign as a commitment to becoming better at being a parent. Remember, no matter how good a parent each of us becomes, each day, we should strive to become better ones! Our children certainly deserve no less!