

A Proclamation for Transforming the Lives of Children



Envision a world where:

- every child is wanted, welcomed, loved, and valued;
- every family is prepared for and supported in practicing the art and science of nurturing children;
- adults respect children and honor childhood;
- children joyfully participate in the vital life of family and community; and
- dynamic, resilient life-honoring cultures flourish.

We will create this world by:

- recognizing that in nature's design there are *biological imperatives** that must be fulfilled to support optimal human development;
- identifying the evidence-linked principles that arise from these imperatives; and
- acting on these principles that are essential for transforming the lives of children.

Families today face unprecedented challenges— isolation, loss of the extended family, conflicting advice about how to parent, and the stress of modern-day life.

Even with these challenges, some children are thriving due to the love and commitment of their families and communities. What can we learn from them?

It is the birthright of every human being to be conceived, carried, birthed, and nurtured in the best possible way. By recognizing and responding to these *biological imperatives** individually and collectively, we foster optimal human

development and a brighter future for our world.

A growing body of evidence now documents that the quality of a person's earliest experiences has a major impact on that person's entire life. It is therefore essential that we, as a society, give high priority to fully nurturing our children.

Children Are in Crisis

- Solutions Abound
- Education Is Key
- Action Is Essential

The Alliance for Transforming the Lives of Children is dedicated to ensuring that parents are supported in practicing the art and science of nurturing children and experiencing the joy of being parents.

Each of us is parent to every child.

How we treat the child, the child will treat the world

Our children are the future of our world.

* Biological imperatives range from those conditions required for mere physical survival (food, water, air, and shelter) to those that foster optimal human development. This document focuses on what children, thus our species, need to thrive rather than simply survive.

Children Are in Crisis

Pregnant women subjected to physical
or emotional violence
28%

DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S HEALTH, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Infant circumcisions that are medically indicated or beneficial
0%

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, COUNCIL ON SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS

US Infants denied the benefits of breastfeeding for the one-year
minimum recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics
86%

ROSS LABORATORY'S ANNUAL MOTHERS' SURVEY, 1998

Children documented to have been physically struck
by age six months
25%

BEARING WITNESS: VIOLENCE AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY, SL BLOOM AND M RICHERT

Number of infant and toddler facilities that fail to
meet minimum standards
92%

U. OF COLORADO, DENVER, ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT:
COST, QUALITY, AND CHILD OUTCOMES STUDY TEAM

Children living apart from biological father
40%

US BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS, 1998

Children ages 6-12 who have not had a 10-minute conversa-
tion with a parent in a month
20%

CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND

Number of murders witnessed on TV and computer games by
the average child before reaching school age
16,000

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, *PHYSICIAN GUIDE TO MEDIA VIOLENCE*, 1996

Increase in suicide, ages 5-14 (5th leading cause of death) since 1979
200%

US NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS, CDC, JULY 2000

US children under 18 estimated suffering from a psychiatric
disorder that compromises their ability to function
9 million

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Number of children under 18 arrested in US per year
1.6 million

US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

US pre-schoolers living below the poverty line
5 million

US BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS, 1997

Never before has one generation of American children been less healthy, less cared for, or less prepared for life than their parents were at the same age.

—National Association of State Boards of Education

Never before has there been such a wealth of information on keeping children healthy, caring for them, and preparing them for life.

—Alliance for Transforming the Lives of Children

Solutions Abound • Education Is Key • Action Is Essential

aTLC is committed to:

- identifying the *biological imperatives* for optimal human development;
- defining the principles and specific actions that arise from these biological imperatives;
- making this information readily accessible and understandable to all parents and caregivers;
- supporting families in implementing the actions essential for transforming the lives of children and adults; and
- fostering dynamic, resilient, and life-honoring cultures.

aTLC invites you to join the Alliance by:

- becoming familiar with the Proclamation and Blueprint for Transforming the Lives of Children;
- implementing in your daily life many of the Actions such as those described in the aTLC Blueprint;
- sharing the vision of the Alliance with your family, friends, and colleagues;
- endorsing this Proclamation (see form below or website); and
- making tax-deductible contributions to support the work of aTLC.

Principles for Transforming the Lives of Children (abridged, see Blueprint* for full version)

aTLC's Philosophy: *Children are innately good, cooperative, and whole in spirit. Parents do the best they can at any given moment, within their present situation and life circumstances. Agreement on a set of guiding principles by all family members promotes enjoyable, confident parenting and provides children with a consistent, supportive environment.*

aTLC offers the following evidence-linked Principles for promoting optimal human development in post-modern cultures that have forsaken the support and wisdom of the extended family and village, instituted medicalized childbirth, and accepted as normal the isolation and sensory deprivation of infants. Our deep concern for children and parents is woven into each Principle. We invite you to ponder these Principles, which we hope will motivate and inspire you. We encourage you to recognize and follow your intuitive knowledge and instincts. Our intent is to help you co-create with children a life that is practical, harmonious, and joyful.

- All children are born with inherent physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs that, when met, foster optimal human development.
- Every child needs to be securely bonded with at least one other person—optimally the mother.
- All children are by nature social beings, born with the drive to play, learn, cooperate with others, and contribute to their world.
- Each child carries a pattern of development designed to unfold at a unique rhythm and pace.
- Young children communicate their needs through behavior that is strongly influenced by innate temperament, early experiences, the behavior modeled by others, and current circumstances.
- The ability of parents and caregivers to nurture children is strongly influenced by their own birth, childhood, and life experiences.
- Children depend upon their parents and caregivers to keep them safe and to protect them from emotional and physical neglect, violence, sexual abuse, and other toxic conditions.
- A child who is nurtured in the womb of a healthy, loving, and tranquil mother receives the best possible start in life.
- A natural birth affords significant benefits to mother and baby; therefore, both the potential benefits and risks of any intervention warrant careful consideration.
- Breastfeeding, continual physical contact, and being carried on the body are necessary for optimal brain and immune system development, and promote the long-term health of the baby and mother.
- A father's consistent, meaningful, and loving presence in a child's life is significant to the child, father, mother, and the wellbeing of the family.
- Parents create a strong foundation for family life when they consciously conceive, foster, or adopt a child, and are committed to understand and meet the child's needs.
- Single parents have a special need for a strong emotional and financial support system to effectively nurture their children.
- Political, economic, and social structures either enhance or diminish parents' opportunities to nurture and sustain a secure bond with their children.
- When children live in socially responsive families and communities, they receive a foundation for becoming socially responsible themselves.
- Effective parenting is an art that can be learned.

By implementing these Principles through Actions such as those suggested in the aTLC Blueprint,* societies can transform themselves into dynamic, life-honoring cultures where children are loved, protected, respected, valued, and encouraged to joyfully participate in the vital life of family and community.

* See next page for the abridged Actions. If the Blueprint of Principles and Actions is not attached, see the aTLC website.

Actions for Parents, Caregivers, and Society (abridged, see Blueprint for full version)

- Encourage prospective parents to carefully consider their readiness to assume the roles and responsibilities of becoming a parent.
- Honor pregnancy as a natural event (not a medical condition) and recognize the importance of the mother's emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing; a safe environment; a strong support system; and communication with the unborn as an aware, sensitive being.
- Consider all birthplace options, recognizing that birth experiences are enhanced in home, birth center, or hospital settings that support parents' birthplan detailing their informed choices for labor, birthing, and the postpartum period.
- Select a birthing environment that clearly supports the infant-parent attachment process, e.g., actively encouraging immediate and continual physical contact, breastfeeding, and the involvement of the father in supporting the mother and connecting with the newborn.
- Support secure infant-parent bonding through the early days, weeks, and months by respecting attachment-promoting behaviors, e.g., breastfeeding on cue, carrying infants in arms or slings, avoiding substitutes for human contact—strollers, pacifiers, stuffed toys, etc.
- Assist in building additional support for the single parent.
- Recognize and nourish every child's innate goodness and wholeness of spirit, innate motivation to learn, and unique rhythm of development.
- Create environments that meet children's innate needs for caregiver constancy, unconditional love, a nutritious diet, and security.
- Protect children from harmful environments, e.g., physical or emotional trauma from people or media exposure, and environmental toxins and pollutants.
- Minimize our own barriers to nurturing children as parents, caregivers, and a society by addressing any dysfunctional patterns caused by our own early unmet needs or traumatic experiences that occurred around pregnancy or birth.
- Foster sense of belonging to a responsive and responsible community by providing children with opportunities to contribute to others.
- Provide ready access to education and support for parenting.
- Develop family-friendly economic, political, and social structures that clearly support and value the raising of children understanding they are the promise of our planet's wellbeing.

aTLC Affiliates (partial listing—see website)

Academy of Certified Birth Educators, Olathe, KS
 American Homeschool Association, Anchorage, AK
 Association for Pre- & Perinatal Psychology and Health, Geyserville, CA
 Birthing the Future, Durango, CO
 Canadian Soc. for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Midland, ON
 Center for Effective Discipline, Columbus, OH
The Compleat Mother Magazine, Minot, ND
 Doctors Opposing Circumcision, Seattle, WA
 Families for Natural Living, Norge, VA
 Global Maternal/Child Health Association, Eugene, OR
 Infant-Parent Institute, Champaign, IL
 The Liedloff Society for The Continuum Concept, Portland, OR
 The Natural Child Project, Bend, OR
 Northwest Attachment Parenting, Seattle, WA
 Nurses for the Rights of the Child, Santa Fe, NM
 Nurture by Nature Network, Northfield, CT
 Physicians for Midwifery, Biloxi, MS
 The Rebozo Way Project, Santa Barbara, CA
 Santa Barbara Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara, CA
 Touch the Future, Nevada City, CA
 Virginia Birthing Freedom, Willis, VA
 The World Cafe, Mill Valley, CA

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Send to: aTLC, 901 Preston Ave, S-400, Charlottesville, VA 22903

Yes! I want to support aTLC

Name _____ I endorse the Proclamation/Blueprint (initials: _____)

Address _____ I will participate on a committee (see website for listings)

_____ My tax-deductible donation is enclosed \$ _____

Phone _____ Email _____ Visa/MC: _____ exp. / _____

Blueprint for Transforming the Lives of Children

Principles and Actions for Creating the Foundations for Optimal Physical, Emotional, Intellectual, Social, and Spiritual Development



A. Consciously Conceiving

Principles

1. Parents create a strong foundation for family life when they consciously conceive, foster, or adopt a child, and are committed to understand and meet the child's needs.

- a. Parents welcome children best when they consciously prepare their own bodies, minds, and spirits for pregnancy and birth, and think of conception as a deep commitment between themselves and the baby.
- b. Even when pregnancy is unplanned, both parents can create a healthy, nurturing environment for their child.

Actions

1. Encourage prospective parents to carefully consider their readiness to assume the roles and responsibilities of becoming a parent.

Areas of consideration include:

- a. Determining whether having and raising a child fits with the parents' desired lifestyle.
- b. Recognizing any expectations that a parent might have of a child.
- c. Assessing parents' physical, mental, and emotional readiness to conceive a baby with loving intention and full awareness
- d. Considering potential parents' present ability to love and nurture a child.
- e. Assessing the availability of physical and emotional support from family and community.
- f. Contemplating any lifestyle choices necessary to allow either parent, ideally the mother, to remain with the child for the first one to three years.
- g. Being fully informed of the long-term implications and potential risks—as well as benefits—of any artificial measures (such as sperm and egg donation, surrogacy, or fertility drugs) when natural conception and gestation are not possible.

B. Fostering an Optimal Womb Environment

1. A child who is nurtured in the womb of a healthy, loving, and tranquil mother receives the best possible start in life.

- a. The unborn child is a sensitive being who is aware of, and responsive to, the mother's feelings and experience.
- b. A growing life is strongly influenced by the mother's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing, as well as the quality of support she receives throughout pregnancy.

1. Honor pregnancy as a natural event (not a medical condition) and recognize the importance of the mother's emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing; a safe environment; and a strong support system.

Fundamentals include:

- a. Active involvement of the father as a vital partner during pregnancy and childbirth preparation.
- b. Access to physical, emotional, and spiritual support from empathetic family, friends and community.
- c. Supportive, sincere, and caring partnerships with prenatal care providers, including access to a midwifery model of care and information about potential risks and benefits of medical procedures (e.g., ultrasound, amniocentesis, or extended bedrest).
- d. Preparation for childbirth, breastfeeding, and the postpartum period through accessing the available educational and supportive resources and services.
- e. A nutritionally balanced diet supplemented with appropriate, carefully selected prenatal vitamins and minerals.
- f. Activities that promote emotional and mental wellbeing and strengthen and tone the body, such as walking, prenatal exercise, yoga, tai chi, singing, meditation or prayer, and focusing on positive stories about natural healthy birth.
- g. A lifestyle and environment free from toxic substances and conditions such as tobacco (including second-hand smoke), alcohol, over-the-counter medications, non-essential prescriptions, and other drugs, as well as unsafe levels of air, noise, and light pollution, impure drinking water, chemical hair and skin products, and chemical cleaning agents.
- h. Education and preparation for newborn parenting, and sibling readiness.
- i. Communication with the unborn child through touch, music, singing, and visualizing a healthy, loving relationship.
- j. Exploring parents' individual attitudes and values on parenting and raising children.

Evidence Links

Support for many of these Principles and Actions can be found on our website via links to abstracts of studies in the scientific literature:
<www.aTLC.org>

C. Preparing for an Optimal Birth Experience

Principles

1. A natural birth affords significant benefits to mother and baby; therefore, both the potential benefits and risks of any intervention warrant careful consideration.

- a. A natural birth is more likely to occur in an environment based on the midwifery model of care, with physical and emotional support, nourishment, freedom of movement, and individualized attention.
- b. The possible benefits of any contemplated test, procedure, drug, or surgery must be weighed against the immediate and long-term risks, according to current scientific evidence.

Actions

1. Consider all birthplace options, recognizing that birth experiences are enhanced in home, birth center, or hospital settings that support parents' informed choices for the labor, birthing, and postpartum process.

Birth experiences are enhanced by:

- a. Childbirth education that empowers women to trust their body's innate wisdom and instincts, and the natural process of giving birth.
- b. Unrestricted access to the birth companions of a woman's choice, including father, partner, children, family members, and friends.
- c. Unrestricted access to continuous emotional and physical support from a caring and skilled woman (e.g., a doula or labor-support professional).
- d. Access to professional midwifery care.
- e. Availability of accurate descriptive and statistical information about birth practices and procedures for birth care, including interventions and outcomes.
- f. Culturally competent care that is sensitive and responsive to the specific beliefs, values, and customs of the mother's ethnicity and religion.
- g. Freedom for the birthing woman to walk, move about, and assume the positions of her choice during labor and birth (unless restriction is specifically required to correct a complication).
- h. Selection of a birthing facility that follows clearly-defined policies and procedures for:
 1. Collaborating and consulting with other maternity services, including communication with the original caregiver when transfer to another birth site is necessary;
 2. Linking the mother and baby to appropriate community resources, including prenatal and post-discharge follow-up and breastfeeding support.
- i. A birthing facility that does not *routinely* employ practices and procedures that are unsupported by scientific evidence, including but not limited to shaving, enemas, IVs, withholding nourishment or water, early rupture of membranes, electronic fetal monitoring, induction, augmentation, episiotomies, and clamping the umbilical cord before pulsations stop, and that has a cesarean rate below 10% (15% if a tertiary-care hospital).
- j. The use of relaxation practices and non-invasive labor aids, such as breathing techniques, warm water baths, massage, music, acupuncture, and aromatherapy as alternatives to the use of painkillers or anesthetic drugs unless specifically required to correct a complication.
- k. A birth plan that details the informed choices of parents for their labor, birth, and postpartum experience; caregivers who agree to support the plan; and a contingency plan for parents' active involvement in decisions to use technology or any deviation from their birth plan.

D. Supporting Early Postpartum Attachment

1. Every child needs to be securely bonded with at least one other person—optimally the mother.

- a. The infant-mother bond is primary and lays the foundation for all future relationships.
- b. Securing and maintaining a strong bond is the foundation of a parent's effectiveness and the key to a child's optimal development.

1. Select a birthing environment that clearly supports the infant-parent attachment process.

This environment offers:

- a. Respect for the interdependence of the infant-mother unit, supporting immediate and uninterrupted contact between mother and infant 24 hours per day (rooming in).
- b. Respect for the significance of the father or partner's role in supporting the mother and connecting with the child during the birth and postpartum period.
- c. Support for kangaroo care (i.e., using the mother's body rather than incubators) to stabilize the heart rate and body temperature of premature or sick infants.
- d. Support for mothers to initiate breastfeeding within an hour of birth, and to sustain lactation even if they are separated from their infants.
- e. Support for successful breastfeeding by responding to the baby's cues to nurse and by giving no artificial formula, teats, pacifiers, food, or drink other than breast milk.
- f. Referral to support groups (such as La Leche League) for breastfeeding mothers.
- g. Respect for the baby's attachment-promoting behaviors by not interfering with eye contact, "body molding," suckling, etc., immediately following birth.
- h. Respect for infants by telling them what's happening in their environment and what's going to be happening to them.
- i. Protection from over-stimulation (bright lights or loud noises) or trauma to the infant (separation from mother, taking blood specimens, or circumcision).
- j. Support with meals, childcare, housework, etc., during the postpartum period.

E. Protecting the Vulnerable Infant-Parent Bond

Principles

1. Breastfeeding, continual physical contact, and being carried on the body are necessary for optimal brain and immune system development, and promote the long-term health of the baby and mother.

- a. Spontaneous breastfeeding for a minimum of two years supports optimal bonding, immunity, and nutrition.
- b. Carrying infants in-arms or wearing them in slings throughout the day provides the near-constant movement that optimizes brain development as well as the touch, safety, and comfort essential to secure bonding.

2. A father's consistent, meaningful, and loving presence in a child's life is significant to the child, father, mother, and the wellbeing of the family.

- a. The father's role may begin with preparation for conception and continues with the physical and emotional protection and support of the mother, baby, and mother-child bond.
- b. In the absence of the biological father, a bonded, ongoing relationship with a loving male caregiver is optimal for every child.

3. Single parents have a special need for a strong emotional and financial support system to effectively nurture their children.

- a. Respecting and supporting a child's healthy relationship with *each* parent is essential to the child's self-confidence and self-value.
- b. A support system that includes healthy-functioning adults of both genders and multiple generations provides balanced nurturing and role modeling.

Actions

1. Support secure infant-parent bonding through the early days, weeks, and months by respecting attachment-promoting behaviors.

Support for infant-parent bonding includes:

- a. Valuing the father's/partner's role as protector of mother and infant and involving the partner in early bonding and the baby's care.
- b. Breastfeeding by responding to the baby's cues, exclusively for 6 months, and sustained for the World Health Organization's recommendation of 2+ years, and for as long as both mother and child are benefiting and comfortable.
- c. Avoiding, as much as possible, the use of substitutes for human contact—strollers, portable baby seats/swings, cribs, pacifiers, bottles, and stuffed toys.
- d. Maintaining skin-to-skin contact, smiling, making prolonged and steady eye contact, gently stroking the baby, and making soothing sounds.
- e. Carrying infants in-arms or wearing them in slings provides the near-constant motion essential for the vestibular (inner ear) stimulation that results in optimal development of the central nervous system—except when they want to creep, crawl, or walk on their own.
- f. Providing safe, shared, and accessible sleeping arrangements (e.g., a family bed or adjacent co-sleeper).
- g. Recognizing that the baby is a social being, whose crying or other behaviors are not “manipulations” but communications of valid needs, and that meeting those needs is not “spoiling” but is the best way to ensure optimal emotional development.

2. Assist in building additional support for the single parent.

Potential support includes:

- a. Developing a network of both genders that may include biological family, family-of-choice, or parent support groups.
- b. Finding ways that an absent parent can maintain a consistent and meaningful presence in a child's life when a parent cannot be physically present (e.g., letters, photos, phone calls, etc.).
- c. Helping navigate a single parent through the complex social services system when financial assistance is needed.
- d. Alleviating the isolation of many single parents with, community or co-housing options and programs that offer foster aunts, uncles, and grandparents, etc.

F. Honoring and Respecting the Child's Intrinsic Nature

1. All children are by nature social beings, born with the drive to play, learn, cooperate with others, and contribute to their world.

- a. Children are most able to reach their full potential when treated with respect in a loving environment that meets their emotional and physical needs, and encourages and supports innate curiosity and spontaneous learning.
- b. Flexibility, clear thinking, age-appropriate problem-solving, and intuition are optimized in a child-led learning environment that offers clear, consistent and respectful boundaries along with creative, cooperative activities, interaction with nature, unstructured play, and time simply to *be*.

2. Each child within a unique pattern of development designed to unfold in accordance with the child's own rhythm and pace.

- a. All children deserve trust and respect for their own emerging learning styles and abilities.
- b. The better parents are able to understand their child's pattern of development, the better they are able to nurture their child in harmony with this pattern.

1. Recognize and nourish every child's innate goodness and wholeness of spirit, inborn motivation to learn, and unique rhythm of development.

Recognition and nourishment includes:

- a. Understanding that those who understand a child's pattern of development are better able to nurture a child in harmony with this pattern.
- b. Responding to a child's interests and abilities, rather than imposing a structured academic curriculum, especially before age seven.
- c. Recognizing and supporting multiple types of intelligence (e.g., kinesthetic, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, or logical-mathematical).
- d. Offering plentiful access to resources and support for artistic expression.
- e. Allowing time for unstructured play—both alone, and with parents, caregivers, and other children.
- f. Avoiding the use of bribes, threats, or punishments to enforce desired behaviors; instead recognizing challenging situations as teachable moments or opportunities to solve a problem together.
- g. Avoiding the use of rewards to motivate children to learn or to reinforce behaviors; instead offering genuine warmth, encouragement, and support.
- h. Validating and acknowledging children through words and actions, and being respectful of the child's saying (or indicating) “No” or “I'm not ready.”
- i. Being calm, respectful, present, and supportive when children need to release stress, hurt, and trauma.

G. Identifying and Meeting the Child's Innate Needs

Principles

1. All children are born with inherent physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs that, when met, foster optimal human development.

- a. Emotional needs for unconditional love, touch, and attention are as valid as physical needs.
- b. Responding to crying rather than leaving children alone to “cry it out” shows them that their needs are acknowledged and deepens their **trust, initially in their parents, ultimately in their world.**

2. Young children communicate their needs through behavior that is strongly influenced by innate temperament, early experiences, the behavior modeled by others, and current circumstances.

- a. Children naturally imitate those around them.
- b. When adults discover what a child's behavior is actually communicating, they are better able to respond to the *need* rather than react to the behavior.

3. Children depend upon their parents and caregivers to keep them safe and to protect them from emotional and physical neglect, violence, sexual abuse, and other toxic conditions.

- a. Violence, such as spanking, shaming, emotional abuse, and circumcision weakens or impairs children's sense of wholeness, trust, and security.
- b. Toxic influences that damage children's brains and nervous systems include over-stimulation from video games, computers, and television, as well as highly processed foods, environmental contaminants, and behavior-modifying drugs.

Actions

1. Meet children's innate needs for caregiver constancy, unconditional love, and security.

Innate needs are met by:

- a. Caregiver constancy (i.e., one or two caregivers, ideally the parents) for at least the first three years—avoiding frequent or prolonged separation.
- b. Unconditional love that is not dependent on the child's behavior.
- c. Consistent and reasonable limits that are communicated respectfully, without punishments and threats (“You may do this,” rather than “Don't you dare do that.”).
- d. Parenting that recognizes uncooperative behavior as an expression of unmet needs (e.g., good nutrition, attention, or the release of pent-up emotions), temperament (e.g., highly sensitive or introverted), or unrealistic expectations of the child's current stage of development.
- e. Parenting that creatively and compassionately responds to behaviors caused by unmet needs, e.g., defusing the situation with play or humor (“let's pretend”), redirecting or offering choices (“you can do this” instead of “don't do that”), or replaying (“let's start over”).
- f. A healthy, nutritious diet of whole foods, avoiding refined sugars, processed foods, additives, colorings, and pesticides.
- g. Access to nonviolent, nonsexist, and multicultural media and experiences.
- h. Access to safe outdoor play and direct experience with the natural world, along with abundant opportunities for spontaneous movement and exercise.
- i. The communication of healthy, responsible values about the body and sexuality, including respect for the right of infants and children to explore their bodies in healthy ways.
- j. Honoring and respecting every child's right to bodily integrity (i.e., intact genitalia).

2. Protect children from harmful environments.

Protecting young children includes:

- a. Protection, as much as possible, from exposure to loud noises, bright lights, toxic substances, passive smoke, too much direct sunlight, and household chemicals.
- b. Minimal exposure to TV, video games, computer programs, and other electronic media, with careful monitoring of content.
- c. The right to private time, and permission to refuse touch—including hugs and kisses—even from relatives.
- d. Protection from physical or emotional violence (e.g., caregiver anxiety/conflict, spanking, or verbal abuse such as threatening or shaming, “timeout,” or any other form of isolation).
- e. Recognition of the need for the child's immune system to mature when considering the benefits and short- and long-term risks of vaccinations, especially live vaccines and those given at birth or before the baby is two years old.

aTLC invites you to join the Alliance by:

- Becoming familiar with the Proclamation and Blueprint for Transforming the Lives of Children.
- Implementing in your daily life many of the Actions such as those described in the aTLC Blueprint.
- Sharing the vision of the Alliance with your family, friends, and colleagues.
- Endorsing the Proclamation and Blueprint (see form with Proclamation or visit our website).

aTLC, 901 Preston Ave, Suite 400, Charlottesville, VA 22903 (888) 574-7580 <www.aTLC.org>

H. Healing Trauma and Dysfunctional Patterns that Diminish Caregiver Effectiveness

Principles

1. The ability of parents and caregivers to nurture children is strongly influenced by their own birth, childhood, and life experiences.

- a. The more adults understand and compensate for their own unmet physical and emotional childhood needs, the better able they are to meet the needs of children in their care.
- b. Once they are better informed, parents who lacked adequate information, resources, or support during the earlier stages of their children's development can strive to compensate for unmet needs.

Actions

1. Minimize our own barriers to nurturing children as parents, caregivers, and a society.

Minimizing our barriers includes:

- a. Recognizing that our ancestral and family patterns, as well as our conception, prenatal, birth, childhood, and life experiences impact the ways we welcome and care for our children.
- b. Addressing dysfunctional patterns caused by our own early unmet needs, and recognizing the need for positive role models and caring and supportive communities.
- c. Recognizing and tending to a mother's need to heal any stressful experiences that occurred while pregnant, or during the birth or early childhood of her offspring.
- d. Strengthening a child's attachment, if circumstances interfered with early bonding, by holding, soothing, carrying, playing, massaging, and attending to their signals for the need for quiet reflection.

I. Fostering Attitudes and Behaviors that Promote a Child's Contributing to Society

1. When children live in socially responsive families and communities, they receive a foundation for becoming socially responsible themselves.

- a. Children learn to respect and respond to the needs of others when they are seen and heard, and their opinions and needs are recognized, respected, and met.
- b. Engaging children in age-appropriate, creative, and compassionate problem-solving and decision-making within the family and the community fosters their becoming responsible members of a society.

1. Foster children's sense of belonging to a responsive and responsible and community.

Responsive and responsible community involvement can be fostered by:

- a. Creating a harmonious family environment that practices creative and constructive problem-solving.
- b. Providing age-appropriate opportunities to practice problem-solving and decision-making.
- c. Supporting cooperative rather than competitive activities.
- d. Access to, and age-appropriate responsibility for, pets, plants, etc.
- e. Encouraging community involvement and intergenerational relationships by providing children with opportunities for service (e.g., volunteering in the community, visiting the sick, welcoming new neighbors with homemade gifts, etc.).
- f. Encouraging children to initiate and generate activities and celebrations with family and friends.
- g. Responding to environmental problems with actions (e.g., planting trees, recycling, picking up litter in the park).

J. Providing Access to Parent Education and Support

1. Effective parenting is an art that can be learned.

- a. Information about children's developmental stages, temperament, and individuality helps parents make informed decisions and serve as advocates of the child's wellbeing.
- b. Ready access to evidence-linked information about optimal human development is vital for societies that have departed from nature's biological imperatives.

1. Provide ready access to education and support for parenting.

Parent education and support programs include:

- a. Preparation of prospective and expectant parents for assuming the roles and responsibilities of becoming mothers and fathers.
- b. Classes and support groups that promote attachment-style parenting.
- c. Information about children's nature, needs, developmental stages, temperament, and individuality.
- d. The resources and encouragement to enable parents to make informed decisions and to advocate for their child's medical care, wellness, education, and safety.
- e. School programs that promote awareness of the roles and responsibilities of mothers, fathers, siblings, and communities in fulfilling the needs of a child.
- f. Counseling and consulting for parents facing difficulties with their children.

K. Advocating Family-Friendly Work Policies and Social Practices

Principle	Action
<p>1. Political, economic, and social structures either enhance or diminish parents' opportunities to nurture and sustain a secure bond with their children.</p> <p>a. Support from the immediate community and society at large is crucial if parents are to maintain a secure bond with their children in a nuclear family structure.</p> <p>b. Society benefits and families thrive when health care and socio-political structures support all families in preparing for optimal gestation, birth, and parenting.</p>	<p>1. Develop family-friendly economic, political, and social structures that clearly support young families.</p> <p><i>Support structures include:</i></p> <p>a. Work leave for parents of each newborn, or newly adopted child, to share a total of 450 maternity or paternity paid leave days to be available as the primary caregiver for that child (following the Swedish example).</p> <p>b. A minimum wage sufficient to allow each parent to work a maximum of one fulltime job outside the home.</p> <p>c. Flextime, part-time, and job-sharing positions with paid time to care for a child's illness and provision to attend children's shows, sports events, and to volunteer at school.</p> <p>d. The welcoming of children in or near the workplace.</p> <p>e. Family schedules that accommodate at least one family meal each day, unstructured time with children undisturbed by work, phone, television, email, faxes, and voicemail.</p> <p>f. Cooperative baby-sitting within communities, with the option of exchanging time instead of money.</p> <p>g. Synchronization of school vacation schedules so that extended family and friends can holiday together.</p> <p>h. Health-care coverage that promotes wellness as well as access to, and coverage for, a wide variety of conventional and alternative medical treatments.</p> <p>i. Health policies that accommodate and encourage informed consent as well as informed refusal for treatment.</p> <p>j. Family-friendly community environments that welcome children and encourage family activities.</p>

Frequently Asked Questions

What is aTLC doing with the Proclamation and Blueprint?

We are disseminating our findings (and those of our Affiliates) via our website, online discussion group, and electronic newsletter. We also have a guide to children's and parenting books, public presentations, and soon will have a downloadable slide show, a speakers bureau, local networking groups, regional conferences, and an international congress. In addition, we continue to compile data supporting the Principles and Blueprint of actions and will be sponsoring research in areas where none exists.

Who is aTLC's initial audience?

Ultimately aTLC hopes to reach everyone. At this early stage of our work, we are addressing the approximately 26% of people in Western culture who are most ready to hear our message—the so-called “Cultural Creatives” or “Early Adopters.”

As growing numbers of people embrace and implement aTLC's Principles and Blueprint of actions, we will make the information more accessible to ever-widening populations.

What do you mean by “evidence-linked”?

There is a large and growing body of scientific evidence supporting nature's design. aTLC cites this research wherever documentation is available and encourages research in areas where evidence has yet to be scientifically documented.

Are the Proclamation and Blueprint complete?

These documents are works-in-progress. aTLC's review process ensures that the documents are periodically refined. aTLC will be sponsoring an online discussion group specifically for this purpose.

What if I feel guilty when I learn that I didn't do everything “right”?

Don't confuse guilt with regret. Guilt results from doing

something that we knew was “wrong” *at the time*. Regret comes from *later* learning that we could have done something better. When we understand the difference between guilt and regret, we can move beyond blaming ourselves for what we didn't know or weren't able to do.

How can I deal with any regrets about things I wish I had done differently?

Few parents feel they have parented perfectly. None of us likes to think that there is anything we have done, or not done, that may have compromised our children's optimal development. We are all products of our time and culture, as were our parents and all those who preceded them. We could not act on information that we didn't have. Even when parents have the information, sometimes cultural and economic conditions limit parents' ability to implement what they know would be best for their children.

We can transform any regret we may feel into motivation to better understand and meet the needs of our children.

Recognizing that there are things I did or didn't do in the past, what can I do now with this new information?

Children never outgrow the need for the nurturing of being seen, heard, touched, and valued. When we honor the wholeness of our children's spirit and treat them with more love and respect for their unique rhythm, character, and ability, we can compensate for many of our children's unmet needs. When we nurture our children in these ways, we also heal ourselves. The most important thing we can do with this information is to implement as many age-appropriate actions as possible (such as those described in the aTLC Blueprint) to strengthen our bond with our children.