An interview with Dr. Wayne Dyer

How often, as a parent or grandparent, do you wonder (and worry) whether you are capable of providing the guidance necessary for children to emerge as healthy, self-reliant, resilient and confident adults?

Dr. Wayne Dyer assures you: You can guide your children toward becoming compassionate, heart-centered adults who lead fulfilling, “no-limit” lives. The difficulties and challenges he overcame in his own childhood have made Dyer a remarkable teacher for adults, and now he’s teaching children as well. His new series of inspirational children’s books combine conscious-parenting concepts with the visionary wisdom found in his many bestsellers. With titles like Unstoppable Me!, It’s Not What You’ve Got, and Incredible You!, Dyer is able to teach young people tangible lessons about the power of intention, how to set goals and deal with challenges, the importance of a positive attitude, and the power of the words we say to ourselves. The latest book in the series is I Am: Why Two Little Words Mean So Much. Each book is packaged in vibrant, colorful pages so that children and their grown-ups can enjoy reading time and again.

Dyer found the inspiration to write these books by looking back at his own childhood experiences and looking into the future lives of his own children and grandchildren. Dyer’s father was an abusive alcoholic who abandoned his mother and two older brothers. With few options and fewer resources available to her, Dyer’s mother had to relinquish Wayne and his two older brothers to foster care. Dyer spent the first 10 years of his life in and out of Detroit orphanages and foster homes before his mother was able to reunite the family.

Determination and a positive attitude helped Dyer rise above adversity. He completed a tour of duty in the Navy, earned a doctorate in counseling psychology, and authored 30 books on motivation, spirituality and self-empowerment. Dyer credits his success to his ability to act on lessons he learned about self-reliance, resilience and faith. His message to adults and children is “any one of us can overcome adversity to make our dreams come true.”

Although he has achieved fame as a psychotherapist, teacher and motivational speaker (he’s been called “the father of motivation”), Dyer is proudest of his experiences as a father who has “raised eight children who all are self-reliant adults.” In this interview, he helps us understand
that the power of parenting is not only about what we teach our children, but also our willingness to allow our children to be our teachers.

Before we talk about the important messages you have for parents and children, tell me about one of your most remarkable parenting moments.

As a father and grandfather, I've been blessed with abundant opportunities to be present with babies. My favorite parenting moment is holding them right out of the womb, cutting the cord, and holding them again. We can learn amazing lessons from observing babies and trying to emulate their joy.

You didn’t come forth into this world to suffer, to be anxious, fearful, stressful or depressed. They've done nothing to be so happy. Babies don’t work. They have no possessions, they poop in their pants, and they have no goals other than to grow and explore the world. They don't have teeth or hair, and they’re pudgy and flatulent. How could they possibly be so joyful and easily pleased? They’re in a constant state of love—they’re still in harmony with the Source that intended them here. Be like that baby you once were. You don’t need a reason to be happy…your desire to be so is sufficient.

What did you learn from your most embarrassing parenting moment?

One time, when I was rushing the kids out of the house for school, I raised my voice at my daughter. She replied, “I wonder if all those people would buy a book from Mr. Positive if they saw the way he talks to his 9-year-old daughter?” Kids are very good at showing you your own behavior. What are you modeling to them?

When did a lesson you were trying to teach one of your kids take an unexpected turn?

Many times. Our children can be our greatest teachers if we allow it. One moment that is quite
funny to me now was when my daughter was old enough to complain about how she was being parented. I explained to her that she chose her parents when coming into this world, and if she didn’t like the way I parent then she shouldn’t have chosen me. She replied, “I chose you? I must have been in a hurry.”

Recently, I overheard my daughter mimic me while she was “disciplining” her doll. Unfortunately, she wasn’t impersonating one of my better moments. Right away, I thought, “That’s not what I want.” So, let’s talk about what you believe parents really want for their children.

I think parents who are truly aware of themselves, their thoughts and behaviors and the impression these make upon a child, really want something deeper than the material measures of a successful life portrayed in the media. Over the years of being a parent, and having had the opportunity to ask parents this question, the answers gravitated around a central theme that I believe is as relevant today as was when I first wrote the book. Parents want their children to value themselves, to be self-reliant and independent, to take risks, to be free from stress and anxiety, to live peaceful lives, to celebrate present moments, to value wellness and creativity, and to feel a sense of purpose.

Is that realistic?

[Parenting is] the toughest job. The fact is, most parents don’t know how to balance what we truly want for our children and the realities we face each day because we have not learned that simple secret ourselves. With kids, you must live by example. If you yourself have not learned how to cultivate inner happiness that can carry you through adversity, you can’t teach that to your children. We want our children to grow into content, high-functioning, no-limit adults who can handle life’s challenges without getting so overwhelmed by outside forces or their own emotions that they feel defeated. If this is what you really want for your children then there’s no excuse why it can’t be realistic.

Let’s talk about “no limits,” because people are likely to misunderstand this concept when related to child-rearing.
A no-limit person—child or adult—has no internally imposed limitations and they refuse to allow outsiders to place any limits on them. It’s the same as saying self-actualized, conscious or inner-directed. This is a person who has high levels of self-respect, regardless of the situation. They are doers, not complainers. They are motivated by higher qualities, they are compassionate and concerned for others, they give to life rather than just seeking out what they can take from life. You can spot a no-limit person easily: They experience joy and inner peace even while everyone around them is going mad. They are the calm within the storm.

What prompted the children’s book series?

One of the things I most enjoyed as a parent was reading to my kids at bedtime. Sometimes, after we finished reading we would embellish the story with our own ideas. When I started writing books, I had my children in mind. I wanted them to have, in one place, some of the most important practices they could choose to adopt for a fulfilled life. The essential message—to help people overcome self-imposed limitations and realize their own magnificence—is a message for everyone, from infancy to old age. I want children to know just how unique and powerful they are, and that everything they need to create happy, successful lives is within them.

What are some of the lessons taught in these books?

Incredible You! uses vivid illustration and rhyming verse to teach 10 ways to let your greatness shine through. Some of the lessons are sharing the good in yourself and seeing the good in others, thinking good thoughts, and taking care of your mind and body. Unstoppable Me! teaches no-limit thinking using an example and illustration of how a child might apply the lesson in her life. Both of these books have questions at the end for a parent and child to talk through together.

It’s Not What You’ve Got! takes on the biggies: money and abundance. How do you portray these concepts so that children understand and embrace them?
I teach lessons that, given the economic downturn we’ve faced in recent times, a lot of adults didn’t learn. It is crucial for children to learn that money does not create happiness and to live within their means. I also teach that every kind of job is important, just as the people who perform them are important. I wrote with Kristina Tracy to create rhyming verse brought to life through illustrations [by Stacy Heller Budnick] that resonate with kids at their level. This, combined with the conversations parents and kids have as they read the book, helps them understand, for example, that abundance is something more than just money.

No Excuses! is a book I’m using in my home, now. My daughters are 6 and 8 and already have all kinds of excuses for why they can’t do something. It’s even raised memories from my childhood, of being told, “You’re full of excuses.” I try to be aware of how I respond to these excuses so that I’m not reinforcing them.

It’s great that you cultivate that awareness with your daughter because you can change the way you respond to her and change the lesson. In turn, she will learn what I hope this book teaches many children: how to spot how often they use excuses and how excuses can stop them from doing things they really want to do. This book, which adapts concepts from the book Excuses Begone!, tells a story of a boy with a seemingly impossible dream who almost lets excuses get in his way. There are questions to explore with your child to promote insight and understanding.

What is the best parenting advice you’ve ever received?

Teach only love. It’s also the best advice I could give.