

## The Misbelief that We Are Never Enough: The Challenge for Parents and Caregivers to Reconnect with Ourselves

Pia Dögl

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### **I'm embarrassed to admit it**

Since our now 10-year-old daughter was born, I always tried hard to include the gifts of Waldorf education and incorporate Pikler's principles into my parenting.

When I founded the Emmi Pikler House for neglected babies and toddlers in Berlin, together with Pikler expert Ute Strub and Waldorf expert Elke Maria Rischke, I was surrounded by wonderful early childhood teachers, and I learned an incredible amount from their profound wisdom. One of the best things I learned was to look at the young child with deep respect and reverence.

When our daughter was still a baby, I remember moments during daily care routines, for example, when changing her diaper, where, although I followed everything I'd learned from the Pikler Approach, I noticed that something was missing.

It took me months of honest self-reflection to become aware of what I was missing and to remember what had actually drawn me to the Pikler Approach initially.

It was my desire that my daughter feel truly seen, respected, and warmly held in a trusting relationship.

But what I also noticed when I allowed myself to look more deeply at my own needs:

I want the same for myself: Feeling truly seen and respected for who I am, and deeply connected to those around me. But I noticed that I did not always feel deeply connected with my daughter.

So, I wondered, what am I doing wrong? Why don't I always experience this joyful, fulfilling togetherness, feeling fully present and united with my wonderful daughter? Why did I sometimes feel like something was missing?

I kept these questions and my feeling of not being fully present and connected to myself. I felt embarrassed to talk with my teachers and mentors about my experiences, because I thought I was the only one who felt this way. And I believed that I felt this way because I was either not capable of doing any better or maybe I was just not good enough.

I focused on making sure everything looked perfect to the outside world. I tried to work harder, read more books about Waldorf and Pikler, but this only increased the burden I felt to do everything the way I thought it should be done – the "right way."

I think the most powerful and supportive lesson for me would have been to hear experienced early childhood teachers sharing their personal reflections on:

How can I be present and deeply connected with each child in my care, especially when I am a parent myself? And how do I stay connected with myself?

It would have been such a relief and inspiration for me to hear that being fully present and being truly connected with the young child and myself is a daily learning process. A process that includes, in my experience:

- The courage to self-reflect
- Emotional self-awareness & self-knowing, and
- The sense that it is safe and ok to be tender and vulnerable

Only in this space of mindfulness and our courage to stand in a space of unknowing do we see the child



in his true being, in each moment.

As soon as we are in our heads, dealing with thoughts and emotions triggered by worries and anxiety, such as “I’m not enough,” we can’t be fully present anymore. Then we just do what we think is right. But when we are in our heads, it isn’t possible for us to perceive with all our senses, to be truly aware of our own actions and the child’s needs.

My intention with this article is to encourage parents and professional caregivers to gently and compassionately look at their own misbeliefs about not being enough, needing to do more, and having to work harder to get it right.

My feeling of being burdened only grew because I was afraid of not being appreciated, worthy, and belonging. But this inner stress only makes us tired and keeps us isolated rather than allowing us to thrive into a deep connection with the young child and ourselves.

### **Self-awareness: the precondition to being truly present & connected**

As professional caregivers of children 0-3, we do not teach our children math, handwork, or how to read. We exemplify, through who we are, how to grow into our full potential, how to build connection, find inner balance, stability, meaning, and trust.

But how can we teach and live all that if we are not aware of it ourselves?

And we can only do this by diving into our own inner landscapes: our own needs, expectations, beliefs, habits, inner wounds...

I remember, from back when I was still changing my daughter’s diapers, the simple yet fundamental question that came to my mind one day like an inspiration:

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### *How much do I know about myself?*

To find out more about *yourself*, I invite you to take a few moments to reflect on the following questions:

- Am I aware of the moment when I am not connected with my child or children anymore and instead I am dominated by my own worries, fear, doubts...?
- Am I aware of when my inner stress is rising and what this stress is about?
- Am I aware of when my energy level shifts from high to low when I'm busy caring for the children?
- How much of what I'm giving to the young child am I longing for myself?

Asking yourself those questions can be the beginning of consciously realizing how profoundly our own self-awareness, our inner presence, affects the quality of our relationship with the children we care for. If we aim to be sustainably open-hearted and empathetic with the young child, we have to first learn to be the same with ourselves.

### **Allowing myself to be more active inwardly and less active outwardly**

We know from the Pikler approach how fundamental it is to observe the child without disturbing him in his activities, explorations, self-discovery, free movement and play.

From my own experience and from my work with parents and caregivers, I know how difficult it can be to "simply" observe the baby and toddler, to be truly present without acting unless it is needed.

But how can we simply observe if we live in the misbelief that we are not enough?

Our inner critic and the uncertainty caused by believing we are not enough, drives us to do and to give more!

### **Becoming more active— but from within!**

In my experience, it is not so much about doing less and being more - it is more about the conscious shift from doing less in the outside world to mindfully doing more from within.

The process of becoming more self-aware requires our active participation, our DOING - but it's doing that helps us reconnect with ourselves so we can be present again.

### **Doing from within - a simple awareness practice**

I invite you to try the following practice, which will allow you, in just a few moments, to mindfully shift your attention from inner worries to greater stability and openness.

First, think of a situation where you have been with a little one and not feeling connected -where you felt uncertain, stressed or unstable.

Bring yourself back into that situation by recalling as many details as possible. Allow yourself to feel the same level of inner stress rising and observe how your body reacts.

Notice your upper chest area. Observe how it moves when you feel unstable, stressed, and, perhaps, overwhelmed.

How is your breathing?

Is your inhale the same length as your exhale?

Or is your inhale shorter and more shallow than your exhale?

Do you feel any tendency to hold your breath?

If you notice any differences between the lengths of your inhale and exhale, try to mindfully keep the inhale and exhale the same length.

To do this, count to 4 with each inhale and to 4 with each exhale. Do this for 3 more breathcycles.

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Now I invite you to do something that you may have never done before, so it might feel a bit weird at first.

Try to make little circles with your upper chest:

3 gentle and calm circles clockwise and then the other way around

3 gentle, calm circles counterclockwise.

It isn't important how big or exact these circles are. Your circles are unique and just right the way you create them.

More important is that you observe what changes, how you feel while doing those circles, while focusing within your body.

Does it help you to come back to yourself - to feel more in your body and more grounded?

**If we feel burdened and under stress it is physically impossible for us to truly act mindfully and compassionately**

I invite you to do those circles in your upper chest area from now on at least once everyday.

Start practicing them when you do *not* feel stressed. It's easier to build a new habit and routine when you're feeling calm. Under stress, our brain goes into protection mode, and that makes it physically impossible for us to act mindfully and compassionately.

So if we want to become present again, while caring for our little ones, we need to know how to reconnect with ourselves first; we need to know how to mindfully bring ourselves back to an inner

From there we can observe with new clarity, inner precision, and joy. Simultaneously there is belief that we are not enough fades away like a wave in the ocean.

We now become capable of seeing and supporting the child in his unique thriving, which helps him unfold into his wonderful, precious potential.

**Things to remember:**

- Being fully present and being truly connected with the young child *and myself* is a daily learning process. A process that includes:
  - The courage to self-reflect
  - Emotional self-awareness & self-knowing, and
  - The sense that it is safe and ok to be tender and vulnerable and to let others know that I feel that way
- Only in the space of mindfulness and our courage to stand in a place of unknowing do we see the child in his true being
- As soon as we are in our heads, dealing with thoughts and emotions triggered by worries and anxiety, such as "I'm not enough," it is physically impossible for us to truly be present and act compassionately
- We have to know how to mindfully reconnect with ourselves first, how to get back to our inner balance, in order to truly connect with the child again.

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*Pia Dögl, mom, special educationalist, parent coach, author of the parenting Book [Beginning Well](#) and international keynote speaker, originally from Germany, has dedicated her work to fostering the individual potential of children from birth on and to supporting relief of parenting stress. Pia founded [Beginning Well® Everyday](#), an organization that supports parents and caregivers to transform overwhelm into calm, self-doubt into confidence and loneliness into deep connection.*

*She also co-founded and managed the Emmi-Pikler-House, a temporary home for neglected babies and toddlers, in Berlin. Pia now works internationally with parents, caregivers, teachers, and health professionals on self-development, raising self-awareness, empathy, trust, and inner presence. Her work always goes hand in hand with practical, simple yet deep transformative insights on how to be more mindful and gentle with ourselves and, of course, with our precious little ones.*

If you are a parent or caregiver that also struggles with the misbelief of not being enough or feeling burdened, stressed, or overwhelmed by daily caring responsibilities, don't hesitate to reach out to me. I have experienced how life changing it can be to transform inner unbalance into stability, confidence, compassion, and deep connection.

For questions about online courses, parent coaching, or speaking events, go to [www.beginningwell.com](http://www.beginningwell.com) or contact me directly at: [info@beginningwell.com](mailto:info@beginningwell.com).