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INTRODUCTION

As a therapist working with children and families for the past twenty-five-plus years, I have witnessed the magic of positive experiences changing children's and families' lives for the better. I created this book as an opportunity for caregivers to tap into that positivity, and to discover new ways of seeing and relating to their children. This book is structured in an A to Z format, with a "concept word" for each letter as well as corresponding activities. These activities will help you, the caregiver, improve the quality of family connectedness. By doing these activities, you'll find yourself interacting with your children in a more conscious and deliberate manner. As a result, your home will become happier, healthier, and more stable.

Most caregivers have moments in their lives when they are unsure how to respond to their children; for example, when the children are crying, having a temper tantrum, or are refusing to do what is being asked of them. Caregivers often feel frustrated and/or discouraged because their children are pushing their emotional buttons or stretching them beyond their comfort zones in knowing how to respond.

At different points in time, all caregivers feel overwhelmed, confused, ill equipped, and sometimes even helpless and hopeless in response to their child's actions or the life situations in which their child is exposed. Whether at home, at school, or in the community, as your child matures through the stages of development, he may be: struggling to fit in, feeling like what he says doesn't matter, questioning right from wrong, doubting what he is capable of doing, or isolating himself due to feeling upset or insecure. As a caregiver, it is only human to say, "I can't take this anymore" or "I don't know what to do." Perhaps you may feel like you have "lost your way" as a caregiver and need a helpful jump start. This book is intended to help you learn from your experiences in order to live in the present and create a healthier future.

The *ABCs* is different from other parenting books, as it's more down to earth and to the point. It shows you exactly how you can make a lasting difference in the lives of your children, which in turn will bless your life. It is intended as a gift to families to motivate caregivers to rediscover who your children are inside and out. I firmly believe in the value

of focusing on the positives of how we can help ourselves, and how we can learn from the past. Certainly, we're not defined by how we were raised, by what may have been done to us, or by the choices we have made. Yes, we have been influenced and shaped by our past; however, as adults and as caregivers, we have the power to create our lives—and our children's lives—in a manner that feels right to us as individuals.

Day by day, you as the caregiver are intentionally or unintentionally creating your family legacy. Every moment is an opportunity to be different or better than you are today. I continue to be inspired by Gandhi, who stated, "Be the change you want to see in the world." It is up to you to decide how active you want to be in making a positive impression on your children's lives.

Caregivers with children of all ages will benefit from this book. If you are a new parent, you may be introduced to different ways of seeing how your words, actions, and the environment impact the well-being and development of your child. If you're a more experienced parent, you may be exposed to alternative ways of viewing your role as a caregiver. This book may in fact be a catalyst for reinventing who you want to be as a family.

Therapists, child development staff, educators, and mental health (MH) workers will also benefit from using this book. For persons who work directly with children or families, or both, the book can function as an educational tool and a hands-on activity resource that will engage caregivers during a session or as homework assignments. To note, having a MH professional join the process of going through this book will enrich the overall interactional experience for families.

Since we are not given an instruction manual as caregivers, it is up to each one of us as adults to craft the future; to decide if we want to live more knowledgably and deliberately than before. This book will assist that process of normalizing life's challenges and gifts as part of raising yourself and your children. We, the caregivers, have the power to do things proactively to benefit our present and future generations.