

## Tosha's Preface

Although memories of my early years are sweet, they turned sour abruptly when I was just five years old. My parents divorced and sold the house I loved, my dad moved out of state, while my mom and I moved far away from all my friends. I became a very angry girl. I “hated” my dad, was furious at my mom, changed my birth name of Heather to Tosha, changed schools three times in kindergarten, and spent most of first grade in the principal's office!

Fortunately, I had a mom who never lost sight of my goodness. She remained my advocate, even when I kicked and screamed and got into trouble at school. She kept herself in good emotional shape so she could listen to me rage without taking it personally or losing her cool. Mom was my rock.

Now I'm the mom. I have a husband and three boys of my own with their own challenges. Becoming a parent is, hands down, the best decision I ever made. I love being a mom, but it hasn't always been easy.

By the time my second son was born, I started reacting to everyday challenges more harshly than I wanted to, which left me feeling badly. I knew I needed help. I wanted to know what I could do when my two-year-old went back to nursing every two hours at night, and I had to get up for work in the morning. I wanted to know how I could say, “No,” without yelling. I wanted to really, really enjoy my time with the children.

My mom said, “Call Patty Wipfler. She's local, and she does amazing work with families.” So I picked up the phone

and called her.

A week later I began attending Patty's two-hour parent support group, and it turned out to be just what I needed. In that room we ten mothers were unconditionally loved and accepted. We were offered a safe space to cry and shake and rage about our children and the injustices of situations we faced as parents. And we shared the joy of our successes with each other, knowing the whole room was rooting for us. We were never once judged.

Over a decade has passed since that first meeting. My kids are still very much works in progress. They are now nine, eleven, and thirteen years old. I'm still right here in the trenches with you, using the effective listening tools you'll learn about in this book. When things get tough—and boy do they—even my teenager knows I'm here for him. And I've seen over and over again that when he needs me, he comes for help.

I shudder to think what shape my family would be in without my regular Listening Partnerships, which have given me the courage to listen to my boys' tears and tantrums, to connect with them deeply, to set limits firmly but lovingly, and to play wildly.

The Hand in Hand tools have been a road map for me, shaping my parenting into something I feel quite proud of. Am I perfect mom? Not even close! Are my kids straight-A students who wash the dishes without prompting and never talk back? No, they're not. But they work hard, and they know that I'm not going to let fear stop them from pursuing their dreams. They know how to wash dishes (and do laundry). And they know when they've done something out

of line, and will apologize when they feel in their heart that they're ready. But, most importantly, they know they're loved—no matter what. And when I kiss them goodnight at the end of the day, I know I've done my best and that they have too.

I hope that this book helps you, too, to feel your worth, increase your confidence, and create the change that you long for in your family.

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