



# STUDY GUIDE

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FOREWORD BY RACHEL HELD EVANS

# PARENTING FORWARD STUDY GUIDE

## Author's Note

The one recurring pain point that emerges having curated conversations among progressive parents for the past several years is a palpable sense of loneliness.

Parents who hold progressive values often feel like the minority, even in the most progressive cities. And in a way, that's the way it should be, because parenting forward is about seeing a vision of what isn't reality...yet. It's believing in a world that we still have to work hard to bring into being. So there is always a gap between what we believe the world should be and what the world is in this present moment. Sustaining ourselves in this space can produce a sense of isolation. And if we're not careful, that isolation dips into the territory of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair.

One powerful way to combat this is to come together with other kindred spirits. Not only does this provide a necessary sense of solidarity and catharsis, pooling ideas and resources together empowers our voices amplifying one another and gives momentum to the movements of our respective causes.

If this book, *Parenting Forward*, does nothing else except to be used as a catalyst for you to reach out to other parents and say, "Hey, let's

get together and talk about this book!” only to fall behind on weekly readings but succeeds in drawing together lasting, meaningful relationships, then it would have been worth it for me. I hope you learn from this book, but I hope even more, that you embody the practices of the book in your life, whatever form that may look like for you.

A study guide is a guide, a nudge to steer you towards certain questions to discuss, but by no means is it a final answer to questions. Richard Feynman says, “I would rather have questions that can’t be answered than answers that can’t be questioned.” I hope this study guide is filled with questions that can’t be answered, questions that instigate more questions, questions that haunt you, convict you, affirm you. And most of all, questions that help you fall deeper in love with your children and with fellow parents.

Together,

**Parenting Forward**  
**Cindy Wang Brandt**

# Introduction - Parenting for a Better World

What makes you overwhelmed right now? In the world? In your family? How do you cope when you feel overwhelmed?

Brian McLaren, in episode 26 of the Parenting Forward Podcast, says, “If you’re feeling hopeful, you’re not looking at the data,” it is true there’s a lot of be discouraged about in the world right now. The author suggests that doing small acts of good is helpful. Is that true for you? What small acts of self care, philanthropy, or things you do for your child, helps combat that sense of helplessness?

Raising children is the long game of doing justice because we don’t see results right away. But sometimes, along the way, we do see some glimpses that things are sinking in for our children, or we see them doing justly in the world. What are some examples from your family?

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” ~ Frederick Douglass. What are some of the things you’ve had to unlearn in your life that you hope your children never have to?

Do you think it’s appropriate to bring children to protests? What are some ways we can avoid projecting adult agendas on children while giving them a voice?

Children are both benefactors and agents of justice. How have your children benefited from your parenting because you cared for their equality and liberation? How have your children helped you in advocacy for a better world?

Who are some of the child and teen activists in recent years who have inspired you?

## Chapter 1: A Whole Gospel for a Whole Child

The author says her spiritual upbringing made her feel fractured--that there was a divorce between her body, mind, and spirit. Can you relate? If you grew up believing in the separation of body and soul, how do you think that has impacted the way you think about food, sex, relationships, and more?

Is it surprising to read about the evolution of the history of parenting? Do you think parental instincts are a myth? How much of our response to our kids is shaped by our inherent connection and how much of it is socialized?

The author draws a direct correlation between fundamentalism and authoritarian styles of parenting. Do you agree? If you grew up fundamentalist, or have fundamentalist family, how have you seen this play out?

Have you seen anti-child bias in the world that you were previously blind to? The author gives an example of laughing at children as possibly not dignifying to the child. What examples do you have of “waking up” to the injustices adults commit against children?

Do you have a HSP - Highly Sensitive Child? Often HSPs help amplify the voice of all children by telling adults what hurts them. Has your sensitive child helped reveal some of your blind spots?

## Chapter 2: Good News for the Body

What are some of the ways our children embrace their bodies the way we do not anymore as adults? How have you observed your children enjoy life with their bodies?

Do you struggle with body issues, and is it hard to not project that onto your child?

How does spanking cause dissonance? Between a child and her body? Between the words of love and the act of violence?

Spanking is such a contentious subject, especially on internet mommy wars. Were you spanked growing up? Why do you think there's such resistance to the anti-spanking movement despite ample evidence from credible sources?

What are some of the ways you can honor your child's physical autonomy? In choice of food? In clothing? In hygiene habits? Where do you struggle to find balance between honoring their physical autonomy and needing them to honor social conventions or align with family values?

Masturbation is a normal act of human sexuality. How would you respond if you find your child pleasuring themselves, pre-puberty to post-puberty? How can masturbation be a healthy act that respects a child's body and al-

lows a child to learn what gives them pleasure?

The author uses the example of tickling sessions to help children learn consent. Are there other ways we can consistently boost a child's sense of body agency?

How do you envision your child having a better relationship with their body than you had growing up? What is the potential for a richer life if they stay integrated with their body?



## Chapter 3: Parenting for Imagination

Did you grow up with the idea of “first time obedience?” Has “Biblical parenting” been associated with children obeying parents? How do you think that erodes a child’s emotional autonomy and the right to think for themselves?

Is it a challenge to give your child choices? Why do you think that is? What are some of the mental hurdles we have to offer our children choices?

How often do you ask your child “What do you think?” How have they responded? How have their answers surprised you? How do you respond when they have opinions you don’t like?

What are some of the ways we can celebrate our children’s creativity inherent in their humanity?

What are some of the entertainment your children consume? How can we encourage them to be creators as much as consumers?

How can we keep the magic of imagination alive in our children instead of letting the systems of the world chase it out of them?

\*Since the writing of this book, Malala Yousafzai has released a children’s book called *Malala’s Magic Pencil*. And her father has released a parenting book, *Let Her Fly*. You may be interested in those resources.

## Chapter 4: Healthy Spirituality

How have you approached passing on your faith and values to your children? Are you content with the faith of your upbringing? Or are you passing on something totally different? What kind of tension does it bring up for you?

Do you find yourself passing on your spiritual baggage to your children?

The author believes children are born with inherent spirituality. In what ways have you seen this inherent spirituality present in your children? What are some spiritual questions your children have asked?

Is it tempting to shut down our children's spiritual questions because of your own spiritual wounds?

What is the difference between coercing a child into faith, and compelling them with faith stories? What are some specific examples you've seen or have embodied yourselves?

Have you told your children your faith story? Is it painful, or hopeful to do so? How have they received it?

How can we help our children learn spiritual multilingualism and improve their literacy of world religions and faiths?

## **Resources:**

<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2012/05/top-10-world-religion-childrens-books/>

<https://www.littlepassports.com/>

## Chapter 5: Parenting for Racial Justice

Do you feel equipped to talk to children about racism and racial justice?

Why do you think there's so much silence surrounding racism--both when you were growing up, and the resistance to talk to kids now?

Children are not color blind. Have you noticed your children making comments about people's skin color? How has that made you feel? How have you responded?

We must move beyond thinking of racism as simply personal prejudice by white supremacists, but to see the way racism as a system is at work that impacts everyone. What are some of the ways you have woken up to the realities of racial injustice?

If you have a white child, do you believe racism hurts your white child as well? In what ways?

What resources have been most helpful to you in raising race conscious kids?

Share, or start a free library, of books that are diverse and race conscious. Share your favorite books featuring non-white characters and written by non white children's book authors!

**Best sites that curate diverse books:**

[Books for Littles](#)

[The Conscious Kid](#)

[Pragmatic Mom](#)

## Chapter 6: Parenting for Gender Equality

What was the state of gender equality in your family of origin? What roles did your parents play respective of their gender?

Are you doing things differently in your own marriage? How do your children perceive the gender roles performed by you and your partner?

How is it different talking to your sons and your daughters about gender equality?

There's an example in the book about the movie Frozen, where Kristoff asks Anna for consent before kissing her. Can you think of other examples in pop culture that is relevant to your children that you can use to teach consent and gender equality?

Anger, disobedience, and agency are especially important to make space for our daughters to embody. In what ways have you tried to do this in your family?

Resources:

A Mighty Girl  
Little Feminist  
Kazoo

## Chapter 7: Parenting for Economic and Environmental Justice

How have you seen the culture of over consumption impact your child's soul?

How do you and your children stay “grounded” in the midst of the frenzy of a capitalist society?

Do you think the way advertisers target children is unjust and preys on their vulnerability?

What are some ways we can empower our children's voices to speak up against climate change and fight for their own future?

Are there indigenous groups in your local area who are leading the way for environmentalism and political advocacy? How can your family get involved?

Do you have conversations with your children about the source of the products we consume?

Green Child  
Wilder Child  
Story of Stuff

## Chapter 8: Parenting for Inclusion

Is anyone in your family LGBTQ or friends with LGBTQ members?

Have you seen the way your kids respond to LGBTQ people as radically different from our generation? Their world is a lot more queer-friendly than ours ever was!

And yet, homo/transphobia persists. How do you go about explaining homo/transphobia to your children in age appropriate ways?

How has the church and religious communities at large been complicit in homophobia? How have you experienced this as a queer person? As a straight ally?

We know so much more about the science behind gender and sexuality today than ever before. What are some new things you've learned about our own children's sexual identity, sexual orientation, and their biological sexual make-up?

LGBTQ kids, teens, and adults have a lot to teach us about parenting. They have to fight to live their unique selves, they're activists, and they are spiritually rich. How have you seen the ways LGBTQ members in your lives expand your parenting and life in general?

Queer Kids Stuff



## Chapter 9: Children as Radical Hope

What are the ways having children have changed you?

What are your best moments of nostalgia reliving your favorite childhood memories with your children today?

What are some things that have triggered you as your child lives through tough moments you remember overcoming as a child?

How are you motivated to create a better world because you have children?

Do you find that children inject joy and refresh your energy when you're tired of fighting for justice?