

*foreword by* **GORDON NEUFELD, PhD**

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# REST PLAY GROW

**Making Sense of Preschoolers**  
(Or Anyone Who Acts Like One)

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Based on the relational developmental approach of Gordon Neufeld

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## Making Sense of Preschoolers (Or Anyone Who Acts Like One)

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### Group Questions

#### Introduction: Why Making Sense Matters

1. Why does making sense of young children matter?
2. What does it mean to be a child's best bet?
3. What does it mean to raise a child to reach their full human potential?

#### 1 How Adults Grow Young Children Up

1. What are the three processes that drive maturation forward in children?
2. How do you experience the differences between behavioural and developmental approaches to raising children enacted around you in everyday life?
3. Do you think we are pushing young children to grow up, and what do you attribute this to?

#### 2 The Preschooler Personality: Part Beauty, Part Beast

1. What are the characteristics that come with the preschooler personality?
2. Why can the preschooler attend to only one thought or feeling at a time?
3. What are the six virtues of a mature temperament, and how do mixed feelings give rise to them?
4. Why are some kids more sensitive than others, and what are the challenges and gifts this brings?
5. Can you provide some examples of when you have seen your young child: fill in the blanks, tell it like it is, have no middle ground, have one thing in view only, desire to play, or move from "me" to "you"?
6. What are the ways you can compensate and care for a young child given their lack of impulse control, egocentrism, and lack of consideration?
7. What are some of the signs that your child's brain is developing and integrating mixed thoughts and feelings?
8. What is lost when a child grows out of their preschooler personality, and what is gained?

#### 3 Preserving Play: Defending Childhood in a Digital World

1. Do you feel play is being endangered for your children and competes with their time spent in structured activities, playdates, and the use of digital devices?
2. What are the characteristics of true play, and can you give an example of your child engaged in this?
3. What is the purpose of play, and how do you see it affecting your child's development?
4. What particular bent does your child seem to have when playing—for example, building, designing, telling stories, moving?
5. What are some of the strategies for promoting play, and which ones have you tried?
6. What pressure do you feel to push ahead with academics in the early years?

#### **4 Hungry for Connection: Why Relationships Matter**

1. How do you convey to your child a generous invitation to be in relationship with you?
2. Can you give some examples of how you see your child attaching through the senses, sameness, belonging and loyalty, significance, love, and/or being known?
3. Why is it important at the age of 3 to 4, as a child attaches through significance, not to make your contact and closeness conditional upon performance?
4. What are some of the ways you can foster the conditions that will encourage your child to share their secrets with you?
5. When do you collect your kids, and what are some of the ways you do this?
6. What is peer orientation, and what how have you experienced this among children?

#### **5 Who's in Charge? The Dance of Attachment**

1. What does it mean to have a right relationship with a child?
2. What instincts come with the caring alpha position, and how do you experience these personally?
3. Do you see signs of dependence in your children, and when is it the strongest?
4. Do you know alpha children or have you witnessed how challenging it is to care for them firsthand?
5. In going through the list of reasons behind the alpha child phenomenon, how many of these resonate with you?
6. In looking at the strategies for taming an alpha child, what stands out for you, and how could you use some of these to maintain your caring alpha position in your home?
7. Discuss how you enact your alpha caring role by a) accepting the work of the relationship with a child, b) assuming a caring alpha position in their life, and c) providing more than is pursued.

#### **6 Feelings and Hurts: Keeping Children's Hearts Soft**

1. Why is it important to help your child express their emotions?
2. The brain is hardwired with emotions to move a child in a particular direction. How do you see this happening in your child?
3. What role do adults play in helping children learn a language of the heart?
4. What are the two shields children have to protect their vulnerable feelings, and why is one of them more preferable than the other?
5. What is one of the roots of resiliency in our young children?
6. What challenges do you face personally and socially when your children exhibit strong emotions?

#### **7 Tears and Tantrums: Understanding Frustration and Aggression**

1. Why aren't children born understanding limits and restrictions common to everyday life?
2. How is frustration a useful emotion?
3. Why are tears so important for young children?
4. When will a child exhibit more self-control around their frustration?
5. What are some of the futilities you see your young child struggling with?
6. How do you walk your child from mad to sad tears?
7. What are some of the challenges (if any) you face when your child exhibits frustration or has temper tantrums?
8. What is the problem with responding logically or negotiating with a child when they are frustrated and can't hear your "no" answer?

## 8 Alarmed by Disconnection: Bedtime, Separation, and Anxiety

1. Why is separation so provocative for young children?
2. Why is alarm hardwired into the brain, and why is it such an important emotion?
3. What are some of the typical and hidden sources of separation that a young child faces?
4. How is anxiety related to separation?
5. What are some of the ways parents can bridge the nighttime, daycare, or preschool separation?
6. Who are some of the people you can matchmake your child to, and how have you done this already?
7. Why is shyness not a problem in young children?

## 9 “You’re Not the Boss of Me”: Understanding Resistance and Opposition

1. Why are young children sometimes inclined to resist and oppose the requests of others?
2. What role does the counterwill instinct play in the healthy development of a young child?
3. What are the different forms of coercion typically used to get a young child to comply?
4. How does counterwill prepare the way for separate functioning and independence?
5. Discuss the strategies you use to deal with your child’s resistance and opposition when they stem from feeling too coerced or wanting more room to “do it myself.”

## 10 Discipline for the Immature: Buying Time for the Child to Grow Up

1. Why do young children require discipline, and what is its underlying purpose?
2. Can you see some of the signs of the six traits of well-behaved children in your young child?
3. What is the problem with discipline that uses a child’s alarm system to get compliance?
4. Why do separation-based discipline methods “work” in getting children to comply, and what types of problems can they create?
5. What is the difference between using consequences against a child and in the service of being a responsible parent?
6. What does good discipline serve to protect most of all?
7. Can you give examples of how you have used, or could use, any of the 12 strategies for attachment-safe and developmentally friendly discipline?

## 11 How Young Children Grow Adults Up

1. How are Anna’s following words during childbirth a good metaphor for becoming a parent? “The hardest thing was having to be this mature person and not panic, and realize the more you fight, the harder it was on you. I needed to release myself to this place and pain in order to find my way through.”
2. What are the hardest emotions to contend with in your child, and how are they connected to your emotions?
3. What are some of the ways you can take a break from active parent duty to gather your feelings and thoughts without letting your kids know the degree to which you are struggling?
4. What do we do about parental guilt, and what role does it play in growing as a parent?
5. What does it mean to be a gracious parent, and what are some of the ways we can become this for our children?