



# **The Mother Dance: How Children Change Your Life**

*Harriet Lerner*

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## The Mother Dance: How Children Change Your Life Harriet Lerner

From the celebrated author of *The Dance of Anger* comes an extraordinary book about mothering and how it transforms us -- and all our relationships -- inside and out. Written from her dual perspective as a psychologist and a mother, Lerner brings us deeply personal tales that run the gamut from the hilarious to the heart-wrenching. From birth or adoption to the empty nest, *The Mother Dance* teaches the basic lessons of motherhood: that we are not in control of what happens to our children, that most of what we worry about doesn't happen, and that our children will love us with all our imperfections if we can do the same for them. Here is a gloriously witty and moving book about what it means to dance the mother dance.

## The Mother Dance: How Children Change Your Life Details

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Author : Harriet Lerner

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# From Reader Review The Mother Dance: How Children Change Your Life for online ebook

## Lisa says

I somehow misunderstood the intended audience for this book, expecting it to focus on the relationship between reader and his/her mother. Once I started, it was obviously written for the mother herself. I wasn't one, yet, but I read it anyway, since it seems like an enormously important subject to mothers, and figured I'd get a head start.

IT WAS SO GREAT! Lerner is an accomplished writer, and likable, and it was comprehensive and interesting. I really enjoyed it and was surprised to recognize some of my own baggage around the topic of motherhood (probably caused by living in a misogynist culture that is wholly unsympathetic to moms).

I recommend it to anyone who wants to think about motherhood and have more insight into common issues they might be experiencing (or may in the future).

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## Sara says

I had heard good things about Lerner's other books, so I was surprised to discover that this one is so poorly written. I don't even know how to describe the style... it's a mix of therapeutic advice/case studies, personal anecdotes, soapbox tangents and a few other things she felt like throwing in.

I appreciated her honesty about the ambivalent feelings that accompany motherhood and admissions of her own shortcomings as a mother, but ultimately her example and voice were not compelling to me. I did finish it and was able to glean a few nuggets of wisdom here and there, but I wouldn't recommend it friends. I'm almost tempted to go through it again just to count the number of times she mentions each of the Ivy League schools that she, her husband, her sister, and both of her sons attended. Ugh.

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## Lesley says

Nice to read a "parenting" book that is more about the parent than the kids!

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## K says

Reading Harriet Lerner is like talking with that great friend you have -- the one who's funny, insightful, and opinionated but sufficiently endearing that you can forgive her shooting her mouth off.

That said, I didn't find this book nearly as insightful as "The Dance of Anger." Harriet gave a voice to many things that mothers feel and experience, but nothing she said really grabbed me and as a result, I found the book a little slow-going.

I also found her a little preachy in terms of her ideas about mothers needing to work more and fathers needing to work less. While I do see her points from a systems perspective (Bowen theory is all about spouses getting polarized into specific roles as opposed to developing a wide range of functioning), I think that it will be a long time before the world accommodates half-weeks for both men and women, and meanwhile, one parent's staying home with your kids is a more realistic option if you're seeking to avoid the problem of childcare.

The other Harriet Lerner books I ordered look more promising, so here's hoping. Meanwhile, though, I'm going to take a little break from self-help/psychology.

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### **Jennifer Heise says**

I love everything Harriet Lerner has written, and I always learn something from it. Thinking this was about our relationships to our own mothers, I put off reading this... but I shouldn't have. Though this one is less well-constructed than her *Dance* books, and a lot of the parenting advice has been covered more solidly in *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships* and *The Dance of Connection: How to Talk to Someone When You're Mad, Hurt, Scared, Frustrated, Insulted, Betrayed, or Desperate*, the details and the warm sense of connection here expand on this. In particular, there is a section on Stepparenting in the back that I wish I'd read years ago.

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### **Skylar Burris says**

It's difficult to tell what sort of book Dr. Lerner really set out to write. A book about how having and raising children affects women emotionally and psychologically? A book of random, select parenting advice? A book of counseling case studies tangentially related to parenting? A feminist polemic? The title would have the reader believe Dr. Lerner had definitely settled on the first topic, but it seems to me that equal time is given to all of these topics, and the book therefore lacks focus.

On the first subject, Dr. Lerner offers a number of insights and says many things to which I can relate, especially with regard to the subject of mom-guilt. However, she also seems to have an ideological vision that prevents her from considering that some women do not derive their sense of selfhood primarily from their careers or that some couples may have a better relationship if they undertake traditional division of labor roles.

As a book of parenting advice, it is, as I said, random and select, offering tidbits of guidance here and there with an entire chapter on getting your children to eat well and talking to them about sex. Let's ignore for a moment the question of whether one should take parenting advice from a psychiatrist who makes her husband take a separate plane any time they fly in the event that it should crash (and then justifies her idiosyncrasy by writing, "Sometimes we mothers need to honor our worries even when we can't justify them."). Is her advice good? I don't know. I guess I'd have to try it. And most of it I'm not going to try. Especially not the part where I buy my children massive amounts of any kind of food they like, leave it in the pantry, and let them decide how much and what to eat. Yes, maybe they would tire of fruit snacks after three days of gorging themselves on half their body weight of those jellied confections, but I find it easier just to

say, “No, you may not have more than one package a day.” But then I’m controlling that way. So much better to end their fixation by making it constantly available in large quantities. (She says it ended her sons fixation with sweets. I’m sure it did. How can you be fixated on something that is available in abundance and never forbidden in any quantity? But I’m curious to know—did he actually eat MORE healthy foods and FEWER unhealthy foods after the experiment? That she never says.)

The case studies are sometimes interesting, sometimes not. And the polemic? It’s mild, as far as polemics go. I can get behind some of it, and I shake my head at other parts of it. Dr. Lerner is one of those feminists who assumes she speaks for all women and that those women who do not share her concerns are in denial.

I give the book a generous three stars for the insights I did receive and because, if nothing else, I found it interesting to read.

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### **Violet says**

Overall, I enjoyed the way this book focused on the emotional experience of motherhood, as well as the physical and mental realities of creating a new person and then helping them grow into an adult.

This book is 20 years old now, and some of the ideas, such as birth order effects, are defunct. All the same, a very enlightening read.

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### **Anne says**

I'm a fan of the audiobooks of this authors work because of the slightly patrician, authoritative tone. This was the best yet, the book I wish I had read when my children were very young. It validated many complicated feelings, gave me lots to think about, and was a powerful reading experience.

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### **Diane says**

I only recently became a mother-- my son is 4 months old. Having spent my whole life to this point sure I wasn't going to have kids, it's been a crazy but wonderful adjustment. I don't think this book necessarily taught me anything new, but I don't think it's meant to be that kind of book.

I still enjoyed it. It's given me a lot to think and worry about looking forward at what raising my son will be like.

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### **Doris says**

Second book I have read by Harriet Lerner, both offering amazing insight. In this book she offers something for everyone, new mothers, stepparents, single mothers, empty nesters. mothers of boys, mothers of girls. Highly recommend.

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### **Aram Afkhamy says**

Its a book that every mothers should read. For me the chapters about food and children and the relationship between mothers and daughters were the favorites.

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### **Crystal Oros says**

An absolute must read for anyone who is thinking of starting a family!

Its as raw as life and completely sanity saving for those of us who are in constant fear of doing it wrong or feel like they are lacking the maternal drive that we see in other mothers just based on their childs good behaviour.

Harriet talks about the emotions, thoughts & challenges of being a parent, she also gives insight about step parenting, family of origin paternal influences, gay parenting, empty nest and college transitions and how despite the lables are just as complex as each other & no less challenging since everyone of us parents differently.

Again this is an absolutle must read and is much more informative than reading the birthing, baby toddler books that are written to portray a picture perfect mothering experience.

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### **Anna says**

I usually really like Harriet Lerner's books, but I found this one to be poorly written and lacking a clear focus. A lot of the stories and points were taken from her other books so the whole time I was wondering why I was reading this book if this was a compilation of her other writings. Motherhood is also a big topic to cover, and I wasn't quite sure what her focus was in regards to motherhood.

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### **Helen King says**

I enjoyed this book - it was like reading a series of entertaining blog posts which gave snippets on insight on ways you might think about issues and relations with child(ren) and partner. It appeared from reviews that some people have read it to find THE ANSWERS - I think it is pretty clear from the way Harriet writes that there is no single answer - you need to find the paths that work for you and your child(ren) and also need to be adaptable as yours, and their, needs change. She is also quite open about that fact that even though both she and her husband are psychologists, and she specialises in this area, they get it 'wrong' at times. And mostly, that's ok. What you can give to your child is openness (where appropriate), respect (which also is a two way thing), some grace (she quotes Anne Lamott as saying 'Don't forget that to do a barely good enough job as a parent is the best you can hope for on on most days'. It is a quote reflecting our often high expectations and therefore 'barely good enough job' is probably pretty good).

Other comments I liked were 'Kids can handle painful facts, but they do less well when they have to deal with our unresolved intensity surrounding these facts. Of course, they need to see our real feelings, to see us cry, for example, when we tell them about Grandma's stroke. But kids have a more difficult time with our anxious reactivity ("Amy, let me tell you what your father did now!"), especially when it's chronic and unremitting'

'The hardest part of the job is (not developing the rules but) enforcing the decisions, rules, and limits that you come up with or reevaluating them in the light of new evidence...As we will see, the myth of the 'in charge' mother is just that....My boys would be fighting at the dinner table, for example, and I would tell them several times to stop. They would ignore me and suddenly I would be at a loss, as if a fog had descended on my brain and dissolved my thinking... It felt like something had happened to me, meaning I didn't feel in control of it, although it looked from the outside like I was lazy, wanting Steve to do all the work'

As far as my marriage goes, I recognise I need to achieve more emotional detachment from Steve for us to be together in a better way. Around parenting issues, Steve and I often operate like we are both younger siblings, and we each want the other to take control, and neither of us acts as if we can pull our weight.'

'Within an ordinary day, or a single hour, a mother's wild fury can turn to simple dislike, frank boredom, pure delight, and back again to fury, As one mother commented to me 'The fluidity of my feelings towards my two boys is what saves me ..'

'I received several negative comments from colleagues who felt I was putting a mother's wants over a baby's needs. Mothers are always said to have 'wants' unlike infants and children, who have 'needs'. That a mother might also have needs seems to be a radical idea.'

'Many of us do love your children unconditionally, but we may mistakenly take this to mean that we should 'feel' love all the time, no matter what'.

'Your children will call on you to grow up. You will have the opportunity to achieve a more complex and textured view of your own mother. Your marriage, if it lasts, will be both deepened and strained. And whether you stay married or get divorced, the stakes are so much higher for how you navigate your part in the relationship with your child's father. In every respect children raise the stakes. "My marriage, my death, my failures or successes, all mean more, because they will be felt by a person other than myself as central, determining'.

'I also think that children are the best teachers of life's most profound spiritual lessons: that pain and suffering are as much a part of life as happiness and joy; that change and impermanence are all we can count on for sure; and that if we can't find the maturity to surrender to these difficult truths, we'll always be unhappy that our lives - and our children's - aren't turning out the way we expected or planned'.

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## **Morgan Schulman says**

This is what I imagine it must be like to have a feminist psychologist cool aunt sit you down while pregnant and tell you "like it is". It's thoughtful and irreverent about parenting in a very 2nd Wave, pre-Attachment way (the book is from 1998 and her kids are born in 1975 and 1979), which is very refreshing. More about validation than hands-on advice.

Note: I've seen several reviews of this book say it is anti-SAHM because she mentions in the introduction that she felt she had to put aside her career to raise the kids due to gender norms and she feels very angry about that. I don't see that as inherently anti anything: it's just one woman lamenting her lack of choice and her husband taking a backseat, which I think is something many woman can relate to. Just because her desired choice may have been different then women who chose to be SAHMs does not mean she is attacking them.

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