

PROLOGUE



**Family Matters**  
*The Co-Authors Reflect*

We might not have it all together, but  
together we have it all.

-Author unknown



*The first section of this prologue was written before Tracy Hogg lost her painful and courageous battle against cancer. She was 44. Although she didn't live to see the publication of The Baby Whisperer Solves All Your Problems, published in January of 2005, she spent several months planning and talking about "the family book," as this project was then called.*

*Sherman Oaks, California, August, 2004.* Doctors tell me that my cancer is back. A book about family now seems more important than ever. I don't know what I'd do without my family. Family is the one thing we can count on. Or at least, that's how it should be. Lucky for me, that's how it is. My family and others who feel like family are helping me cope. *Family matters.*

I'm a baby whisperer, not a family therapist. I don't have a degree in psychology. But I've been let into many people's homes. They welcome me into their lives. I sleep in their guest room or nursery. I eat at their dinner table. I join them on shopping trips to the local market. I'm invited to happy occasions, such as a baby naming, a baptism, or a *bris* (the Jewish celebration of circumcision, which is not so much fun for the little boy, I'm afraid). I'm on hand as well when things go

haywire: The flummoxed new mum snaps at her husband for buying the wrong kind of cottage cheese or blows up at her own mum for “just trying to help” by tidying up the linen closet.

I’ve heard and seen it all. And though I stand up for the baby, I’ve always warned new parents that it’s not just about *the baby*. Once an adult or couple bring a child into the world, they become *a family*. In my earlier books, I talked about my “whole family” approach-making your baby or toddler a *part* of your family, not King Baby! Children shouldn’t become the parents’ only focus, nor should they run the household. When decisions are made-whether it’s to give little Johnny singing lessons or move him to another school-the *whole* family should be taken into consideration.

And yet, parents often don’t think about *the whole family*. Instead, they become over-focused on the children and on their role in shaping them. When the baby or toddler doesn’t meet a particular challenge or difficulty, they think it’s their “fault.” And then the guilt sets in. They fret about what they did or didn’t do, or what they should have done. Trust me, luv, guilt doesn’t do anyone any good. It only keeps you from being a good problem-solver. You’re so busy feeling rotten about yourself that you tend to miss what’s right in front of you. Guilt also makes life more stressful and, heaven knows, parents today don’t need more stress!

And here’s the most important news flash, Mum and Dad: You alone do not control how your child “turns out.” Of course, parenting matters. Why else would I have taken the time to write three books about it? But we also have to connect the dots. Parenting isn’t the only reason Johnny bops Charlie on the head with a truck or

Clarissa starts wearing lipstick in fifth grade or sweet 14-year-old Adam suddenly turns “mardy,” as we say in Yorkshire. How they act also has to do with their personalities and their friends, and everything else happening in their lives.

This book is about connecting the dots. I don’t think of it as a parenting book; though it will, I’m sure, be read mostly by parents. If your family is young,\* all the better. That’s when the most important groundwork is laid-and when most parents are more likely to open themselves to new ideas. But if you’re further along the road, not to worry. It’s never too late-and it’s always a good idea- to shift your focus to the whole family.

What do I hope you’ll get from this book? At the very least, you’ll start to see the whole as well as its parts. I hope you’ll begin to pay attention to the daily minute-by-minute little stuff that you might otherwise overlook--conversations, nods, and gestures. In those everyday moments, you’ll find clues about your family and about who each of you is. These little bits of information will help you make better choices and deal with whatever your family has to face. I also hope that the whole family lens will help you see that while you’re important, Mum or Dad, you’re not the only one who matters. So let go of the guilt.

I promise you, though, that the goal is not to have a “perfect” family-heaven’s no! It’s to have a family that supports you and yours-and whatever circumstances *you* have to handle. Some days, you’ll feel brilliant (that’s Yorkshire for “great”).

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\* By “young,” I mean your *family’s* age—the time you’ve been together as a group—not how old you or your children are. They don’t necessarily go together. Some stepfamilies, for example, are very young and yet they might also have kids who are much older and parents who’ve been ‘round the block!

Other days, you'll wonder if you've done anything right!

Even if you do everything I suggest (and face it, luv, you won't), at times life will be unpleasant or difficult. Hard things and bad things happen to all families-even to good families-things that take us by surprise and knock our knickers off. But as my Nan always told me, it's not what happens to you in life that matters, it's what you *do* with it. If you have family whose members are there for each other no matter what, it makes the doing a bit easier.

As you read through these pages, please this keep in mind:

**Any group consisting of parents and children living together in a household qualifies as “a family.”**

Whether you're a biological parent, a step parent, a single parent, a foster parent, a grandparent living with your adult child, or an aunt raising your brother's children, know that when I say “the parents,” I mean you. I consider you and your children “a family,” no matter what. Same sex couples with children are families. Second marriages create various flavors of blended families. Even parents when don't live together, they are still a family- a “family apart,” the term Melinda coined for co-parenting households after divorce.

I've seen it all. I've been at Thanksgiving dinners with exes and steps and half-sibs at the same table-and God bless them for being able to pull it off! I've also been in homes where three generations live under one roof-two adults, children, and one of the adult's parents. In fact, I myself grew up in what might be considered an

“untraditional” arrangement. I was raised by my Nan and Granddad. My mother, Hazel, also grew up with her grandparents. And when I began to work in the U. S., she took care of my girls. It all seemed “normal” to us! None of us is quite sure where our “immediate” family ends and the “extended” clan begins. But there’s always a lot of love to go around. Aunts, uncles, cousins-everyone gets into the act. And that makes all of us stronger.

This is the fourth book of the baby whispering series, and in some ways, our most important. For babies and toddlers, family *is* the whole world. And as children grow up and begin to see what the world has to offer, having a strong family makes *them* strong-so they can handle life. That goes for the adults, too. We all need someone in our corner. That’s why this book can’t be just about the children. It has to be about the whole family.

- Tracy Hogg



*Northampton, Massachusetts, January, 2013.* I was Tracy’s left brain. This was evident from the first time we met in 1999. I had flown out to California from the east coast, so she could meet and judge “the writer.” I was auditioning her, too, and skeptical about the hype. Her Hollywood clients raved, but I’d interviewed tons of parenting experts before. How different—and better—could *she* be?

The moment I arrived, I found out. Straight from the airport, she whisked me to a house in the Valley, where we were greeted by a desperate mother and her

wailing three-week-son.

“Give me him, luv,” she said. Within moments, Tracy had calmed the baby and comforted the mother, who was also crying. I tagged along on other consults over the next ten days and, in between visits, listened to her phone conversations with mothers. In our work sessions, I asked tons of questions. “How did you come up with *that*?” or “Why do you think this works?” It was a challenge to take notes, because Tracy knew so much and rarely stayed on topic. In the midst of explaining breast feeding, she’d veer off into a discussion of sleep!

The babies thrived. The mothers adored her-and why not? Here was a real life Mary Poppins who could swoop down on a family and, somehow, leave them changed. She was sweet and supportive, funny and warm. People opened up to her-and rightfully so. She was a great listener, and an ever better problem solver. When she spoke of “my babies,” it wasn’t just because she took care of those children. It was because she had developed *a relationship* with them and their families.

On our ninth day together, I sat across from her in her office, taking notes and doodling, as I tend to do when listening. As she rattled on about the importance of establishing a structured routine (“You see, luv, babies are like us. They start their day by eating....”), I absently scribbled a big E in the margin. She went on, (“The problem is, parent sometimes try to put them to sleep then, when they should be encouraging an activity, even if it’s just a look out the window...”). I drew a big A next to the E, (“...and *then* they can put them down to sleep”), followed by an S, and bingo! The EASY method was born. (The Y was tagged on later, to stand for

something every new mother needs: time for You.)

And so it began. In work sessions over the next six years, on the phone and via email, I extracted a life's worth of experience and knowledge from Tracy and shaped it with my own thinking. It was the best kind of collaboration-one in which both parties realize that there is no book without the other.

Tracy and I were passionate about the idea of extending her philosophy into the realm of family-the bigger unit of which babies and toddlers are a part. It was a natural place to go, especially at a time when so many parents seemed *over* focused on their children. After years of taking the child's perspective, Tracy knew it was time to shine a light on the family.

More than our first three projects, which were harvested almost exclusively from her experience, this one also tapped into my writing and research. Between us, we had hundreds of stories. She had lived with families; I had interviewed countless parents and spent almost my entire career focusing on relationships. We told one another our own family stories-and knew one another's families. Tracy helped my daughter through the birth of her first son. I spent time with her daughters, Sara and Sophie, and had conversations with her mother, sister and brother, and, best of all, her beloved "Nan," who is 95 at this writing and still going strong-the family's own Queen Mum.

Tracy's and my roots and issues were quite different, but we knew, from both personal and professional experience, that family, though complicated, is where it all begins and ends. Back in 2004, our intention was to go beyond babies and

children-to apply the principles of baby-whispering to this larger entity and to arm readers with simple, practical, and sometimes counterintuitive, advice that would support and strengthen the whole family. Eight years later, the idea is more important than ever.

“Family whispering” is fundamentally about tuning into and staying connected, just as baby whispering was. But here we shine light on everyone, not just the baby. The first half of this book will help you “see” differently-to focus on the whole family. The second half will help you apply this new perspective - “family think”- to the everyday and the unexpected changes your family has to face.

To help you figure out what’s right for *your* family, we’ve peppered this book with lots of questions. Tracy was all about asking the right questions. The ones in these pages are designed to help you see what your particular family is made of, how it functions, its strengths and weakness-and what you can do to make it a place of safety and support for all its members.

You’ll get more out of this book if you take the time to keep a “Family Notebook” (see box, right) in which you actually *write down* your answers to the various questions. Whenever you see


#### **Keep a Family Notebook**

Whenever Tracy visited a new family, whether she was there to establish a routine or solve a problem, she always urged parents to *write down* their observations. It isn’t just a matter of helping you keep track. It’s about increasing your awareness of patterns. To get the most out of this book, then, we suggest you keep a “family notebook” in which you...

- Answer questions posed throughout the book
- Record observations and “aha” moments that occur as a result of tuning into your family.
- Set goals and reminders about trying something different or making a slight change of course.

The act of writing sets your intention and makes it more likely that you’ll move in a new direction, as opposed to staying “stuck.”



this symbol:  -- “for your notebook” -- reach for a paper notebook or an electronic tablet on which you can save your answers and later print them out. The act of *writing* will heighten your awareness, which will make it easier to troubleshoot and, if necessary, change course.

Another benefit of keeping a notebook is that you create a unique document about *your* family-a little insight here, some information there-which becomes a living record of your family’s growth and change and, eventually, ends up showing you something new about yourselves. If you have a partner, answer the questions together or go solo and later compare notes.

The ideas in these pages are drawn from recent social science research and, perhaps more important, from “the trenches”-Tracy’s favorite source of wisdom. Notably, some of our interviewees were already familiar with baby whispering. We talked to parents on the online “forum” that survived Tracy’s original website, as well as to former clients-parents of babies and toddlers Tracy once cared for. These veterans of family life, many of whom have children who are now approaching adolescence, shared how Tracy’s ideas and strategies served their families as their children grew up, how it bettered their lives and their relationships. Even when parents didn’t embrace all of Tracy’s techniques, they all applauded her “whole family” approach, because it honored everyone’s needs.

For example, one of Tracy's former clients, Viola Grant, \*\* a Hollywood producer whom Tracy worked for when her first son was born, stressed that Tracy's advice about family was a huge relief after a severe scolding from her pediatrician. "I had an open house a few days after Simon's birth-and the doctor heard about it from one of my friends who was also his patient. He told me, 'You should be in bed, bonding with your baby.'

"By the time I met Tracy for the first time a few days later, I was flipping out. I told her I was struggling with his advice. I didn't want my baby to get sick, but I'm a very social person and I didn't want to change my life. Staying in bed wasn't me. I was excited for people to come see my first child. Tracy said to me, 'Don't worry, luv. This baby will adjust to the life *you* lead. If this is how your house runs, your baby will be fine. You can go to restaurants, and your baby will be fine. If you feel good and your home feels good to him, he'll be happy.' And she was right. My kids are now 10 and 13, and they can hold their own with adults. They have been raised to be an integral part of the family- not the stars of the family, but members of it."

Invariably, talks like these included discussion about how much of an impact Tracy had made in her too-short life and how much we all missed her. Certainly, I will forever have her unique Yorkshire burr in my head. Every day, I rely on her common-sense ideas in my own life and have passed them on to my daughter, who now has three sons. However, without Tracy at my side, it no longer feels right for

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\*\* This and most names throughout are pseudonyms. In some cases, details have been changed as well.

me to write *as* Tracy. In the past, I managed to capture her “voice” on paper, in part by using her favorite British expressions, like “mum” and “codswallop,” and by peppering the pages with her trademark sense of humor. Now, the journalistic “we” seems more appropriate.

Be assured, though: Everything in these pages is built upon the foundation of baby whispering-principles that go beyond babies and toddlers-and for which we will always have Tracy Hogg to thank.

-- Melinda Blau