

Preface

My daughter has always been a worrier, but my husband and I appreciate her reflective qualities. She is a deep thinker and acts in thoughtful ways. As I was tucking her into bed one night when she was about eight, I could tell she was upset. She looked at me with her serious, round, blue eyes and said, "Why is the news always so bad?" She had heard somehow about a father who had put his child in an oil drum while he went to work. I told her that the news is often bad because the bad stuff is more rare than the good. That's what makes it news. There isn't enough time to report the name of every parent who gave his or her child a goodnight kiss before tucking the child in or who put the child in a car seat and drove carefully to a safe, licensed, and caring day care before going to work. Those activities happen over and over, day after day, in neighborhood after neighborhood. I told her that the father had done a very bad thing, and that people were going to help the little boy and his dad. Most parents take care of their kids. It's just not news when they do so.

Maybe it should be the news. The message that most parents are good enough is one of the reasons that I wanted to write this book for teachers and others who care about positive parent-teacher relationships. When parents and teachers work together, great things can happen. This book will provide an accurate and useful interpretation of parent beliefs and actions. In Chapter 1, you will learn new information, concepts, and viewpoints that you can use in personal and professional interactions with—or about—parents. The chapter is designed to help you review, expand, and

consolidate your existing knowledge base about parents and parenting. The information in Chapter 2 provides insight into what parents expect from teachers. It offers practical suggestions that individual teachers can use to improve communication and collaboration with parents. Chapter 3 explores key ideas that characterize some of the troubles and troublesome attitudes that parents face as they work to raise children in today's society. This final chapter has an advocacy focus for children *and* their families.

Speaking of families, I would like you to meet mine so that you know a little about me before reading my words. I grew up in southern California, where I attended (and later taught in) schools rich in diversity. I was an only child, and both my parents worked. I am Lutheran, but my parents did not attend church while I was growing up. I made the decision to attend church on my own when I was in my early 20s. I taught sixth and seventh grade language arts and social studies for 13 years before beginning my work in the university setting. I have been married to Steve for 22 years. He is of Russian Jewish heritage, but was not raised in the Jewish tradition. It is a second marriage for both of us. My son Paul was four when Steve and I were married. My ex-husband stopped seeing Paul regularly after that, but Paul stayed in contact with his paternal grandparents. Paul calls Steve "Dad," and Steve considers Paul his son. Steve and his ex-wife did not have children.

When Paul was a sophomore in college, he showed up at home by surprise one day. He said that he needed to talk to us upstairs. That meant he needed privacy and that it was important. He told us that he was gay. I gave him a big hug and said, "This isn't going to affect your schooling, is it?" and he laughed out loud. He said, "That's what I told everybody you would say!" As it turned out it, he did drop out after coming out . . . but he has gathered remarkable experiences and continues to pursue his dreams.

Our daughter Cara is in her second year of college and is planning to be—much to her own surprise—a teacher. We

are thrilled for her and her future students. She is musical and sweet. She is an honors student, and we find it funny that she is the only one of our children to be sent to the principal's office for misbehaving during an assembly.

Phil is our youngest and is still in high school. He is a good student and a lot of fun to have around. He didn't much like being the youngest when he was little. He started to cry when Cara came home from school in first grade and read a book to him. He said, "Now I'm the only one in this family who can't read." He was three and a half! Phil is musical and athletic. He is the only one in the family who actually *likes* to work out. We have learned a lot about basketball because of him.

My family is a blended family with different perspectives and experiences. Well positioned in the middle class, we enjoy many advantages. Yet there are aspects of our lives and experiences that have brought us both shared and unique challenges. Every family has a story.

Though the concepts and suggestions you will read are situated in a largely *professional* setting, they are indeed *personal*. You will find the focus here on what *one* person—each of us—can do to improve relationships with others. I hope that the perspectives and strategies you will read help you to build positive relationships that are honest and respectful and that ultimately improve life, success, joy, growth, and learning for children.