Preface

The scholarly papers and commentaries in this book provided the intellectual foundation for the report titled *Hardwired to Connect*, which was issued by the Commission on Children at Risk in Washington, D.C., on September 9, 2003. These papers were presented at a multidisciplinary conference at Dartmouth Medical School for the purpose of investigating the social, moral, and spiritual foundations of child well-being. The first chapter here consists of the summary report from that conference, "Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities." This report is the synthesis and multidisciplinary statement of the 33 members of the Commission on Children at Risk, in their effort to forge a new framework for addressing the needs of youth in the United States.

The organization of this book largely reflects the conference's explorations of our "hardwired connections" in light of cutting-edge work from the brain and behavioral sciences. We first examine neurobiology, as it shapes our earliest development and some of our most basic drives, learning from studies of animals as well as of humans. Following the developmental process itself, we then look at the emergence of conscience and morality, and the "prosocial self." Next, the role of religion and spirituality is explored from the vantage point of new material available to us from technologies of neuroimaging, as well as voluminous evidence from the social sciences. We also choose to pay particular attention to adolescence, as it is a time of onset of many emotional and behavioral problems for young people. As the child's world expands, we focus on the influence of increasing connections in the broader community, including the media. Finally, the commentaries provide insights from leaders on the front lines of children's mental health.

In Part II, "Primal Connections," Larry J. Young and Darlene D. Francis in Chapter 2 introduce us to the biochemistry of connection; that is, the neurotransmitters and receptors that are activated when we fall in love with our mates and our children. We learn that the bonds we feel, and the drives to protect and care for our families, are rooted in chemical interactions deep within the brain. In mammals, the experience of being intensely cared for brings with it many forms of physical and emotional resilience. By looking closely at several generations of rat mothers and pups, we also see that the propensity to care for one's offspring can be passed on both through inherited traits and by the experience of having been intensely nurtured. Whether the parental drive to nurture arises from temperament or social learning, offspring reap the benefits of increased emotional and physical health through several generations.

In Chapter 3, Stephen J. Suomi invites us to learn about the connection between nature and nurture by introducing us to a troop of rhesus monkeys. In a subgroup of these monkeys, we see the relationship between heritable traits that appear to be genetically linked and risk factors for emotional and behavioral disturbances. Suomi's studies demonstrate that these behavioral patterns are not determined by genes alone but rather by the interactions between genes and environment. By enriching the nurturing environment of vulnerable individuals, inherited tendencies toward apparent anxiety, depression, and alcohol abuse can be ameliorated.

Turning specifically to human infants, Robert Karen offers in Chapter 4 a compelling lesson in the history of our knowledge of the importance of mother–infant attachment. He begins in the 1940s with the observations of child psychoanalyst John Bowlby regarding the impact of early separations from the mother on a child's behavior and character. Karen documents the elaboration of this insight by many other researchers, particularly Mary Ainsworth. Whereas the importance of secure early childhood attachment has become a basic tenet of child psychology and the foundation of effective treatment interventions, Karen explores why it has been difficult to implement these insights in the policy arena.

In Part III, we look to the child's development of "higher" functions such as a sense of meaning and morality. In Chapter 5, Barbara M. Stilwell describes the conscience as "a dynamic entity within the self continuously prompting responses to moral issues." Stilwell describes her empirically derived domains for understanding the development of conscience. She goes on to explore the characteristic features of conscience through early, middle, and late adolescence, as well as the formative influences that shape its development.

As an expert in pediatric prevention research and health promotion, Michael D. Resnick discusses prosocial development in Chapter 6. He reviews the evolution of the current adolescent public health emphasis toward a dual strategy of enhancing protective factors and reducing risk factors. Drawing from studies of resilience in the face of adversity, as well as characteristics of high-functioning children, Resnick elaborates on a number of protective factors that appear to enhance prosocial development, including a strong sense of connectedness to family and other adults and institutions in the community, as well as opportunities to develop academic and social competence.

From the vantage point of modern psychology and psychiatry, Paul C. Vitz presents us in Chapter 7 with a history of our understanding of the moral and spiritual dimensions of the human person. Beginning with Freud, Vitz chronicles the theoretical frameworks promoted by leaders of various psychological movements such as psychoanalysis, attachment theory, object relations theory, and humanist, existential, transpersonal, cognitive behavioral, and positive psychologies.

Given that the human experience of religion and spirituality is mediated by the activity of the brain, we begin Part IV, "Connecting to the Transcendent," with perspectives from neuroimaging and developmental psychology. Andrew B. Newberg and Stephanie K. Newberg offer intriguing data regarding the

impact of specific religious practices on brain function. With evidence from brain imaging and knowledge of brain function, Newberg and Newberg describe the relationship between certain spiritual experiences described by practitioners and specific changes in brain function. In addition, they attempt to link what is now known regarding physiologic brain development over the course of childhood with what others have delineated as stages of spiritual development in youth.

In Chapter 9, Byron R. Johnson uses the term *organic religion* to represent the effect of religious activities, practices, and beliefs over time. Johnson has reviewed more than 600 studies examining the relationship between religion and a variety of health outcomes for children, youth, and families. He presents the empirical facts regarding the prosocial and protective effects of religion, and notes that religion appears to have its positive effect on mental and physical health outcomes, based not only on the behaviors and attitudes that it prohibits but also on the behaviors and attitudes that it promotes.

Whereas previous chapters have examined the potent impact that intense parental nurture has upon the psychological well-being of children, W. Bradford Wilcox examines in Chapter 10 the effect of religious affiliation and practice upon parenting styles and behavior. Using data from two separate national surveys, Wilcox is able to describe in some detail the similarities and differences among parents of different religious groups. In addition, he examines the teaching of certain religious leaders regarding parenting and reflects upon the rationale for faith communities' concerns with parental guidance and support.

Julie E. Thomas and Lisa A. Wuyek continue our examination of the role of faith traditions in promoting child well-being by introducing us to a Buddhist perspective on parenting. Focusing on the concept of bodhichitta, similar to compassionate love, Thomas and Wuyeck explore a number of Buddhist concepts and practices useful in confronting the challenges and enhancing the joys of parenthood. They also review the literature regarding the use of Buddhist practices in the context of therapeutic intervention.

Because the teen years are a time when new interests, abilities, and desires bring with them increased risks for many emotional and behavioral problems, we take a special look in Part V at the changing biological, social, and spiritual connections of adolescence. Developmental psychobiologist Linda Patia Spear demonstrates that many of the aspects of teenage behavior that are most challenging to adults are rooted in developmental changes in the structure and capacity of the teenage brain. Not only have these adolescent proclivities been noted by concerned adults throughout history, but the same, quintessential adolescent drives toward risk taking, novelty seeking, and peer affiliation have been seen in other mammalian species as well. Understanding the biologically driven changes underpinning adolescent behavior is crucial lest we mistake immaturity for pathology or fail to provide the structure and opportunities that allow teens to grow safely into adults.

From the purview of psychological anthropology, David Gutmann looks cross-culturally in Chapter 13 at the role of fathers, grandfathers, and other

senior men in the socializing of young males. He introduces us to the features of certain traditional rites of passage that have been used to mark a young man's transition into manhood. Administered by male elders, these rites often emphasize virtues such as strength, bravery, and perseverance while connecting the young man to the spiritual traditions of his community.

Psychologist Lisa Miller reviews several aspects of the development of spirituality and religiousness among adolescent girls and boys. She identifies personal devotion as the most highly protective dimension of religiousness. That protective effect of personal spirituality appears most strongly associated with emotional resilience for teenage girls. Miller suggests that traditions that acknowledge the confluence of physical maturation and spiritual maturity may do much to support the emotional well-being of adolescent girls.

Leading Part VI, "Connecting to Community," psychiatrist James P. Comer uses his childhood experience of growing up in the African American community to analyze the factors that promote success for children. Noting that many of the critical factors have deteriorated in our poorest neighborhoods, Comer recounts the way in which the School Development Program, begun in New Haven, Connecticut, and replicated elsewhere, has organized schools to strengthen connections between families, teachers, and cultural institutions. He also describes a special social skills training program, which provides inner-city children with experiences in mainstream community institutions that are requisite to achievement.

Competing with the human connections in a child's life are the ever more ubiquitous involvements with various electronic media through the Internet, television, movies, and video games. Leonard A. Jason and Kerri L. Kim relate recent findings regarding both the positive and negative aspects of children's media use. They pay particular attention to the effects of children's exposure to violent and sexual content, as well as effects on academic and social functioning. Jason and Kim conclude with strategies to help parents structure and supervise their children's media use.

Bill Stanczykiewicz weaves together the intellectual theory behind the civil society movement with the sociological data that support the role of vibrant community life and positive youth outcomes. Drawing from many years of experience in youth policy, Stanczykiewicz richly portrays the power of local community leaders to transform their neighborhoods for the well-being of their young people.

In our final section, we have invited leaders in the thick of promoting healthy child development to give us their viewpoints. With the astute eye of a seasoned child psychiatrist, Elizabeth Berger walks us through the developmental progression of child character development. She gives us an insider's view of the growing child's perspective, demonstrating the cumulative effect of everyday firm and loving interactions at home and, as the child matures, at school. Locating the critical generation of good citizenship in healthy families and well-functioning schools, Dr. Berger makes a passionate plea for us to mobilize the will and resources to assist families in need and renew our educational system.

As leaders in the motherhood movement, Enola Aird and the Mothers' Council laud the work of the Commission on Children at Risk but also challenge it. They praise its validation of the importance of nurturing, especially mothering, as foundational to the well-being of children and the vitality of communities. They claim "bonding" as a feminist issue and a human rights issue. They argue, however, that the commission does not go far enough to specifically examine the primacy of parents and the real supports that mothers and fathers need to do their essential work well. They also critique its timidity in confronting social and institutional values that undermine healthy childhood ecology.

Since the release of the *Hardwired to Connect* report, members of the Commission on Children at Risk have been invited to speak across the nation in a variety of venues. They have addressed academics and leaders in the health care professions, public policy, education, psychology, theology, social work, youth services, and many parent and community coalitions. The listeners have been intrigued by our organizing motif ("Hardwired to Connect") as an analogy about the human person with great explanatory power on multiple levels. They have also embraced the framework of authoritative communities as a most useful way to organize and enhance their personal and institutional engagements with young people. We commend this volume to you in the same spirit and hope that it will serve as a valuable tool for all those committed to the biological, social, moral, and spiritual health of the next generation.

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