

PRAISE FOR  
*Parenting Out of the Box*

How refreshing, a parenting book that breaks the mold! *Parenting Out of the Box* teaches parents how to tap into their child's self-esteem to help them grow up to be independent, resilient adults! With honesty, compassion and tons of humor that leaves you laughing out loud, Pamela J. Bolen shows you how to effectively connect with your kids and teens.

— TRACEY MITCHELL, *AUTHOR OF DOWNSIDE UP,  
TRANSFORM REJECTION INTO YOUR GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY*

*Parenting Out of the Box* delivers an arsenal of practical tools to support parents as they seek to raise healthy, confident, and independent children and teens. Written by an experienced family counselor who provides a wealth of wisdom, the author equips parents with skills to succeed. Pamela J. Bolen's engaging writing and transparency empowers parents and her humor provides encouragement. Join fun in the toy box as you let old childhood friends become metaphors to teach healthy skills in self-esteem. What better way to learn than to laugh along the way!

— JODY CAPEHART, CO-AUTHOR *BONDING WITH  
YOUR TEEN THROUGH BOUNDARIES*  
EDUCATOR, SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR,  
AUTHOR OF MANY PARENTING BOOKS

In a world filled with entitlement issues, Pamela J. Bolen's book, *Parenting Out of the Box*, is a light for parents, grandparents, and caretakers. If you've ever wondered how to support your child's self-esteem without raising their expectation for entitlement, this book is a must read! The author, both a parent and therapist, unravels the web of confusion and gives solid, profound suggestions for growing happy children into responsible adults.

— MELANIE HEMRY, AUTHOR *A HEALING TOUCH:  
THE POWER OF PRAYER*

*Parenting Out of the Box* is a must read for parents! Parents have such an essential role in the development of their children's self-esteem. Yet many parents feel they themselves are ill-equipped to influence their children in healthy ways. Thankfully, Pamela Bolen has used basic toys to reveal practical principles, as she guides the reader in how to develop character, reassurance, confidence and esteem in your children that will last for a life time.

— DEBBY WADE, MA, LMFT, LPC, CST

I just love this book! Pamela J. Bolen offers parents like me specific guidance on how to transform our kids into joyful, generous, and confident individuals ready to take on the world. Every chapter in *Parenting Out of the Box* ends with journaling questions I need

to ponder about my parenting skills as well as fun family time activities to help my husband and I connect with our kids, promising love and laughter in our home for years to come!

— VICTORYA ROGERS, LIFE COACH/AUTHOR,  
*FINDING A MAN WORTH KEEPING*

Pamela deals with a topic that I'm passionate about—teaching our children to be confident in how God made them, not just teaching them that they can do anything they want if they try hard enough. *Parenting Out of the Box* is a beautiful metaphor that helps us as parents, not only focus our children on their identity in Christ, but also helps us to understand how we can fulfill God's purpose for our lives!

— KAREN COVELL, FOUNDING DIRECTOR,  
HOLLYWOOD PRAYER NETWORK

Every child needs a positive push and a boost of encouragement. Using the metaphor of a toy box, Pamela Bolen creatively opens our understanding of effective ways to build strength and courage into our kids' lives. As parents, we can always use fresh ideas. Pamela equips us with solid principles based on her own expertise as a counselor. Open up this book and dig in, you are sure to find parenting treasures!

— KAROL LADD, BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
*THE POWER OF A POSITIVE MOM*

This book is dedicated to my family.  
Every day you have been in my life has  
been a blessing from God. Your creativity,  
humor and faith inspires me always.

# PARENTING OUT OF THE BOX

*Secrets to Creating  
Healthy Self-Esteem  
in Kids and Teens*

Pamela J. Bolen, *LPC, LMFT*



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## Introduction



**O**UR LIVES BEGAN with toys. Whether soft cuddly bears or brightly colored mobiles, cooing baby dolls or magical musical sets, toys just seemed to be there waiting for our arrival. You may have even had a nursery filled with many toys, rattles, and stuffed animals before you released your first cry.

As wonderful as it is to give material gifts of precious toys to our children, no present, game, or toy comes close to the value of gifting them with an enduring positive self-concept, a gift that leads them towards becoming all God created them to be. The following pages reveal to parents some powerful secrets actually found hidden right inside your child's bedroom, in the toy box. That's right. The very toy box that has perhaps been there since the day you brought your child home from the hospital.

### **Treasure Hunt**

It seems only fitting that such treasures from our beginning would play a vital role in our emotional development. Whether you are in a blended, traditional or single parent family, you will soon discover how the toys you've been tripping over hold a key to promoting healthy self-esteem in your children.

Toys bring so much joy, anticipation, laughter, fantasy, and even security to little ones around the world. Who didn't fall in love with the Pixar movie series *Toy Story* with Sheriff Woody and Buzz Lightyear? We all could relate to the fantasy of our beloved toys magically becoming alive. But developing positive self-esteem in your kids does not require a toy's transformation. So how do toys relate then to self-assurance? They offer parents insight into your current parenting skills so you can learn what works and what doesn't in helping you raise children who love themselves.

*Parenting Out of the Box* reveals metaphors for the common toys found in many children's toy boxes. Most likely your child's toy box contains variations of these cherished items that perfectly illustrate the development of lifelong, healthy self-esteem. Bet you never realized a few toys could hold the keys to shaping and influencing your child's future.

Every parent hopes for a positive self-image for their child or stepchild. Parents want kids to love themselves as much as they want their kids to know they are loved by the parents. But self-assurance and self-confidence doesn't just happen; it is taught.

### **Confident Security**

Yes, it IS possible for children to grow up feeling confident and self-assured in an ever changing insecure world. Even in the midst of conflict and failure you can help your children develop a positive self-image. Kids don't have to be the most beautiful, most popular, or most successful to feel secure. Security comes from knowing you are loved and that you have value.

Many parents don't realize they play a prominent role in children learning to love or hate themselves. And some parents actually have no idea when they are behaving in such a way as to harm their child's self-worth.

But there is a difference between healthy self-esteem and entitlement. Sadly, we are in an age of entitlement when too many children are growing up with little to no concept of responsibility and refusing to move out upon adulthood. Too many are feeling entitled to have Mom and Dad provide for them financially into the 30s, 40s and beyond, while their parents wonder how in the world did they get there!

The kids today, who feel entitled, do so because their parents didn't train them up to have a healthy self-esteem. They didn't learn to do things on their own. They didn't learn consequences for their choices. Rather, they learned that when life gets tough and unpleasant, Mom and Dad step in to fix it and rescue.

Yet, our society is learning that over-indulging and rescuing children from every stress or crisis doesn't

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develop healthy self-image, but rather it develops unending dependence and entitlement.

**God Made You for a Purpose**

Having healthy self-esteem is not about unrealistically pumping your child up to be King of the World. It seems that some people are overly concerned that self-esteem is simply self-indulgence. Quite the opposite is true. Healthy self-esteem is accepting that God made you for a purpose. People often assume when you talk about child self-esteem that parents are trying to convince their children that they can do anything they want. This book is not about that because it is just not true. In *Unleash!*, Author and Pastor Perry Noble talks about this being “The Great American Lie.”

I am about six feet six inches tall, and I weigh around 225 pounds. With that information in mind, what if I told you I really wanted to be a jockey and it was my dream to ride the winning horse in the Kentucky Derby? Be honest—you’d probably laugh a little and say, ‘Dude, at your size, the horse might actually try to ride you.’ I am not the size, shape, or weight needed to be a successful jockey. No matter how much I believed in myself and no matter how hard I tried, I would only wind up feeling like a failure. I’d be a fool to



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dedicate my life to something I was obviously not created to do.<sup>1</sup>

Good intentioned and well-meaning parents unknowingly make mistakes. I hope you find answers on these pages and change things that need correcting. With God, nothing is impossible—the longer you wait to change things the quicker the years pass and the harder it will be to create change. But you picked up this book today, which reveals you are intrigued with the idea of raising healthy kids and you are willing to make change where necessary. You can do this.

### **Growing Independent Future Adults**

I understand you. We all love our kids and we want to do everything for them. We want to give them everything we didn't have. But we can't do that if we want them to grow to be independent and become who they were born to be.

This book is your journey into becoming the parent you were born to be as you help your child become the child he was born to be. To become that parent takes an inside look. It takes a willingness to see what you are doing wrong as well as acknowledging what you are already doing right.

As you see each of the secrets I reveal through each toy we explore, you will see some things you are doing well already and some things, well not so much. But that is ok. Life is about the journey. We

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make mistakes. It's about admitting them, making amends and turning the opposite direction.

Congratulations for picking up this book. You care about raising self-assured, confident, independent children with a healthy self-esteem.

### **Inspiring Better Choices**

That's why I wrote this book: to help parents look inside their parenting skills and see where they can modify and fine tune when needed. My hope is that you will be inspired to stop behaviors that have unknowingly been crushing your child's spirit and adapt behaviors and creative ideas that will build lifelong, healthy self-esteem, for both you and your children.

How did I come to write a book about toys teaching parenting skills? As my own children outgrew their toy box and beloved memories flooded my mind as I collected them for storage in the attic, it hit me how each of them easily represented the lessons and skills I have been teaching my clients for decades.

### **So Tired of Seeing the Struggle**

I had to write this book because I'm so tired of seeing people struggle because of how they feel about themselves. Over three decades of seeing children, teens, and adults held back emotionally motivated me to share the same secrets I've shared with clients. I have seen kids progress academically and socially because of gaining confidence. I've been honored to witness adults improve in their marriage, family and

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work place because they quit believing lies about themselves and replaced it with feelings of value.

I have seen clients of all ages totally turn their world around because they simply started becoming more optimistic. They gained assurance and quit believing they were “losers who wouldn’t amount to anything.” They learned to quit buying into the unhealthy, negative criticisms from the past and broke free to embrace the opportunity to excel. You and your children can do the same.

Feeling like you are worth something can change your course and destination. You no longer have to allow the past to dictate the future. Gaining a healthy self-image can be life altering for those without one. And you can’t teach your children to have a healthy self-esteem if you don’t possess one yourself.

### **Feel Good About Yourself**

Each of these skills show parents how to teach their children to recognize their own value and worth as the parent accepts his or her own. And seeing one’s value leads to a healthy self-concept that indicates you like yourself and you appreciate how God made you, even with all your imperfections!

Wouldn’t you like to feel great about yourself? Better yet, would you like for your kids to experience the joy, peace, and security of positive self-esteem, beginning at an early age and continuing through a lifetime? The gift of self-esteem and the gift of confidence are two of the most important blessings you

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can instill in your child. Let's dive into your child's toy box and find all the tools you need to be all that.

In the pages that follow we will examine beloved toys to reveal what role they can play in your child's development. These 10 toys depicted are actually metaphors for how to build healthy self-esteem in your child, teen, or self. Those toys are the Compass, emergency rescue vehicles, the board games of Battleship® and Sorry®, mirror, Silly String®, bubbles, Pom Poms, train, and medical kit.

Allow the metaphor of the toy box to teach you the parenting secrets to developing lifelong, healthy self-esteem in each and every one of your kids. My goal is to open the eyes of loving parents so you can see how every word you say and every action you take affects your children for better or worse for the rest of their lives.

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## *Box Talks*



Each chapter ends with a “Box Talks” section for you to interact with the material. First, there are journaling questions for you to ponder and react to the chapter—how did the toy discussed challenge you? Have your journal ready to write out your “Aha” moments. The second part of Box Talks is for you to interact with your family. All the Box Talks were written with fun family time in mind.

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CHAPTER 1

# The Compass

“Families are the compass that guide us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights and our comfort when we occasionally falter.”

— ALAIN CORRE



I WAS WORKING WITH A FAMILY that had a teenage daughter who had become quite the challenge. She would not come home at the agreed upon time. She was drinking alcohol, smoking pot, having sex and rarely attending high school. Her irresponsibility also included mounting speeding tickets. That is when they called for an appointment with me. At our first appointment I asked the father if he thought part of the problem was the friends she was choosing. To

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this he responded, “No, her friends aren’t the bad influence. She is.”

This was the very first time I had heard a parent put the responsibility directly on his child, rather than blaming everyone else. It was actually very refreshing. I knew right then there was hope for this family.

Yes, anyone’s behavior is inevitably influenced by whom he spends the most of his time. But, when it comes to friends, choosing to be around a person is ultimately up to the individual. His daughter has a will to choose, and she was using that will to hang with the wrong crowd and in doing so, choosing to engage in those activities by her own free will.

Within a short period of time, thankfully, that family was able to turn things around in a positive direction, and the daughter worked on her issues successfully.



### **The Compass**

The compass, that little circular device with the N, S, E & W written on it with a needle changing every move you make. Which way shall we go? Which way shall we turn? What does it all mean? You probably have one from a survival or camping kit that your child received as a toy. It probably doesn’t work very well because it has been discarded to the bottom of the box. Things, however, don’t always have to operate as we think they should to still deliver a benefit.



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In Isaiah 42:16 it says, “And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them.” We desperately need God as our compass. He is ready, willing and able to guide you through every turn of life, and that includes parenting. We are lost and forever searching until we accept that truth.

The compass serves as a reminder to us that every circumstance can be viewed from different directions. In navigation, altering your course just a few degrees will completely change your destination—same with parenting. A fresh approach to parenting may be all you need to begin seeing vast improvement in your child’s self-esteem. There are many creative ways to gain that fresh approach to build your child’s self-worth. You just need a little inspiration.

### **Driving in a Different Direction**

On my 16th birthday I was given my first car. My 15-year-old sister was not given a car because it wasn’t her birthday and she didn’t have a driver’s license. She apparently had a problem with this as several days a week I would notice that my car was mysteriously out of gasoline. This was extremely frustrating as I was clearly not driving often enough to drain my gas tank every few days. In fact, I wasn’t driving often enough to empty a tank in a week!

I knew somehow my sister was sneaking my car out when I was either away from the house or asleep in my room. So I began clocking the mileage to set a

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trap. Yet, every day the mileage was the same I had written. She didn't seem to be driving my car, but I also did not have a leak in my tank. I knew she was doing something, but I could never understand or prove what!

It was many decades later that she finally confessed to what had happened to my vanishing gasoline. My sister had indeed used my car for an entire year and a half without ever getting caught. How did she do it? She drove my car *backwards*. Yes, she drove it in reverse! You see, the odometer will not advance if you are not going forward. My sister figured that out quickly. So she drove my car all over town in the middle of the night and was never caught. You would think she sort of stood out as a driver going in reverse, but the police never caught her. And sadly, neither did she get caught by my unsuspecting mother and worst of all, me!

In *Praying for Your Prodigal Daughter*, author Janet Thompson writes, "When we start out on a cross-country trip, we know we're not going to arrive in a day. Every town gets us closer to our destination, but they aren't our final goal. Yet without covering that ground, we'd never complete the trip and reach our journey's end."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes you can arrive to the place you want to be, but in ways you never thought possible. You may be able to positively impact your child's self-esteem just by taking a different path, even when it feels like you're driving backwards. You possess the creativity

to enhance and improve how your child views himself and feels about himself. You just may not realize it yet.

### **Verbalize Praise**

What words of encouragement or praise could you share with your child today that would light up their face and heart? What traits do you admire in your child or stepchild that you have identified but have not verbalized? They need to hear it! Many times when I meet family members of my counseling clients, I relay that I've heard so many nice things about them. Most people are very surprised. The usual response is "Really?"

It seems that we all think more positively about our loved ones than we actually verbalize to them. You have an opportunity today to change that! Take a few moments right now to tell your children individually about their positive characteristics. Let them know what you appreciate, what you are grateful for, and how much you love them for who they are. They may think that you've started happy hour a little early, but soon it will become a habit, and sharing positive compliments will be a normal occurrence in your family.

During the many years of my counseling practice, my primary objective has been to teach clients how to problem solve. If a client is dependent on me to solve all of their issues, that may build my job security but it doesn't promote my client's emotional security. Many years ago my oldest son asked me about my job as a therapist. He was curious about how it all worked.

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“So Mom,” he asked, “Do people actually come in and have you tell them exactly what to do about every problem they have?”

I thoughtfully replied, “Well actually, I teach people how to problem solve so they can talk about it then make their own decisions on what to do.”

He looked very confused.

“You mean people come in and pay you all that money, and you don’t even tell them what to do? Mom, I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but I don’t think anyone is going to come back to you for just that!”

I had to laugh, because the truth is I didn’t get into counseling for job security. I got into counseling to help families find emotional security. And one way to work towards emotional security is to tap into your creative side to get your creative juices flowing. You have it in you to problem solve. Let the compass remind you that you have the option to choose what direction to go in your parenting and that will indeed take a lot of creativity! But the good news is that every single person has creativity inside them because you were made by a creative God! Thus, having not yet tapped into your creative side in no way negates that you have a creative side!

Think about your own individual child. What motivates your child to be a better person? What encouraging words could you say to your child that would steer him toward making better choices? Usually, the more you praise someone for a certain

characteristic, the more often you will see that characteristic repeated.

### **Reward Positive Behavior**

Remember behavior modification from Psychology 101? Basically, by rewarding positive behavior (rewards can be verbal praise), you can motivate the individual to repeat the desired behavior. For example, if you make a big deal when your child gives away one of their favorite possessions and then you compliment how giving, unselfish, and kind she is, then you have planted huge seeds in her heart. Those seeds will spring a garden to flourish for a lifetime. Your child will not only feel good about giving, but she will also want to continue giving because it will make her feel good about herself.

One of the qualities people with healthy self-esteem possess is that they are kind and giving to others. Personally, when I reach out to someone in need, I never know whether I am doing it because it makes me feel happy or because it makes the person feel happy. Perhaps it is both. It just feels wonderful to bless someone else.

If you want to develop lifelong self-esteem, teach your child to give generously of themselves. How do you teach a child generosity? By being generous yourself, they will imitate you. It always shifts back to that. What you role model is what they learn, conscious or unconscious. If you want your child to become generous, he needs to see you being generous

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on a regular basis. The same goes for whatever traits you want to instill.

You are under constant, recorded surveillance, which will be replayed over and over. Kids may not remember to take their homework to school, but they remember every time we say one thing but live another. Sorry about the pressure, but it is undeniable. Take an inside look at your behavior around your children. And if you see you are not getting the results you want, perhaps it is time to try a different direction. By the way, you won't be perfect. None of us are.

Please do not read this and feel guilty about your shortcomings as a parent. We all have them. Here's a story that will make you feel better. Many years ago a client came in for her session and said she had had a very good week. When I asked what made it so good, she replied it was because of me. Feeling rather proud, I asked what I had done.

"I saw you getting all your kids in the car at the baseball park on Saturday. It made my week to see that you were normal like the rest of us."

### **Tired of Being Normal**

It made me feel horrible because "normal" probably meant I was yelling and screaming at my kids to hurry and get in the car and put their seat belts on! That session changed my life. I didn't want to be "normal" anymore. From that point on, I tried to treat my family as if all my clients were watching at all times. I'm not perfect and still make mistakes,

## The Compass

even though I try. So please don't feel guilty if you see yourself in many of the examples I write in this book. Take it as a wake up call to change directions by moving just a few degrees to the right or left of your compass. Starting today is better than starting next year or never starting at all.

Strive to be on your best behavior for the sake of the next generation. Strive to be consistent in word and deed. Strive to be an encouraging, uplifting, positive parent. What you do, they learn, even more than what you say.

My mother had my sister and me in church literally every time the doors were open. We went to Sunday school, then "big" Church, and then Church again on Sunday night. We attended Wednesday night service and were also in a mid-week Bible study. In the 8th grade I decided that I had gone to church as much as I needed. I felt that I was good. I was right up there with the angels and probably had some church credit for attending so often.

So the Sunday morning came when I decided to break the news to my mom that I wasn't going to church that day.

She was not happy.

I don't know how she got me to still go to church that day, but as we were sitting together in the pew I turned and announced, "I'm not wearing any clothes under this raincoat."

She apparently did not believe me and said, "You most certainly are!"

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So I opened the left side of my red raincoat and whispered, “You can make me go to church, but you can’t make me wear clothes!”

I guess you now see I had a bit of defiance in me. Now you understand why I was in church so often! If there was hope for me, there is certainly hope for you!

People tell me they don’t go to church because they were forced to as a child. They say they do not want to do that to their children. Your job as a parent is to guide your kids towards healthy habits—even when they don’t want to learn them.

### **Teaching Essential Skills**

We force our kids to brush their teeth. We force them to go to school and do their homework. We force them to change out of dirty, nasty clothes. There are essential life habits and skills parents or someone must instill in children, even when met with resistance. It’s hard to find anyone these days who doesn’t feel they could use therapy for *something* their parent did or didn’t do. It might as well be for encouraging your kids to attend a positive church. Even if you are met with similar resistance as I gave to my mother, it is worth the effort to provide moral and spiritual training to your child.

My mom didn’t scare me into going to church. She just somehow coerced and motivated me to actually want to go most of the time. Pastor Matt Chandler says, “Heaven is not a place for those who are afraid of hell; it’s a place for those who love God. You can scare people into coming to your church, you can scare



## The Compass

people into trying to be good, you can scare people into giving money, you can even scare them into walking down an aisle and praying a certain prayer, but you cannot scare people into loving God. You can't do it."<sup>3</sup> My mom showed me how to love God. She did that by taking me to church and by living out her faith the rest of the week.

No church is perfect because people go there and people aren't perfect.

### *Here are some tips on how to find a home church:*

- *Make sure the pastor teaches the Bible and the messages line up with God's word.*
- *Make sure there is a children's/youth program that they enjoy.*
- *Make sure it is a church that reaches out to others in need.*
- *Make sure it is a church where you are encouraged, challenged and are spiritually growing.*

### **Using Your Compass**

Perhaps you need the compass to move in a different direction. Charting new territory can be an adventure. It can be interesting to travel where you have not gone before. Yes, if you are going to positively