



LIFE
COACHING

Family Coaching

**Tried the pediatrician? Parenting books don't have a clue?
More families are turning to coaching to find answers
and a supportive shoulder.**

Tracy Z. Turner



ur family lives exist in an ecosystem that can be delicate and sometimes hard to navigate. Whether

two people are working to harmonize their own complex personal histories as parents, striving for a balance between career growth and healthy home relationships or falling upon tumultuous times, much of our fundamental happiness begins at home.

While many life coaches may offer a wide range of services that include help with family issues, a growing number of life coaches have honed their expertise to meet the needs of people who are experiencing more specific domestic challenges. Family coaches come in many varieties, often with specializations in specific areas, like the challenges of infant/young child-rearing, improving

relationships with teenagers, help with marital communication problems or developing new coping skills after a major transition, such as divorce, a death or a geographical move.

Dr. Catherine Pearlman, a Family Coach based in Laguna Niguel, Calif., provides “in-home consultations and seminars to help parents obtain a heightened level of parental satisfaction.” She says that family coaching “is a big field with a wide-ranging degree of experience” that can include anyone from experienced parents with a knack for domestic problem-solving to people with extensive educational credentials.

Sometimes, after consulting with a pediatrician and reading every parenting guide on the shelves, a family still can’t come to terms with issues surrounding picky eating, potty training, toddler tantrums or new sibling transitions. Pearlman often fields calls under those circumstances.

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ore than half the time, Pearlman is contacted about sleep issues like transitioning an infant

from a crib to a toddler unit, or a young child who is having difficulty sleeping in his or her own bed. Parents may also call her for feeding issues, such as a child who will only eat white foods, potty-training struggles, toddler tantrums, transitions when a new sibling is introduced to the home or questions about whether a young child is ready for kindergarten.



To really see what is going on and help a family that is struggling, Pearlman says that her business is built on home visits. “A family could come to my office fifteen times, tell me about what’s happening and I still may not be able to see what’s going on,” she says. “But if I stop by their home at 4 o’clock on a Thursday afternoon and stay until dinnertime, I can see the dynamics of the household and parenting...sometimes parents call me for one reason and I end up seeing something different.”

The clearer the picture of what life is like for a family, the more effective she feels she can be in coaching them into improving their situation. “They’re not going to be able to make a lasting change if there’s a different, or bigger, problem that’s not being addressed,” she says.

Sometimes Pearlman has a family chart all of their child’s food and sleep for three days. She then uses that data to make recommendations. Her involvement with a family is often short-term, but intense. “I will follow the family every day for two weeks, do a lot of fine-tuning within that time, then let them go off and work on it themselves for a bit,” says Pearlman. “Sometimes things go great and I never hear from them again, or I may hear back from them a few weeks, months or sometimes even a couple of years later to revisit and do a bit more work.”

In the age of Google and the bombardment of advice and information a family may encounter in important decision-making about a child, Pearlman sometimes also assists in helping families find reliable information. “Someone may call me and say ‘my child has been diagnosed with ADHD. I want to use medication and my husband doesn’t,’” says Pearlman. “Then I will look up studies showing what the current research says to help guide them.”

As many resources as there are available to help parents navigate child-rearing, finding a trustworthy and knowledgeable family coach to consult with can be an invaluable and confidence-building added support.

Tracy Zollinger Turner is an award-winning feature writer and editor with a knack for getting people to talk about things that matter to them and then telling their stories with compassion. She resides in between the hills and cornfields of the midwest with her fiancé, son and three interrupting dogs. Find out more about her at www.writearm.com