

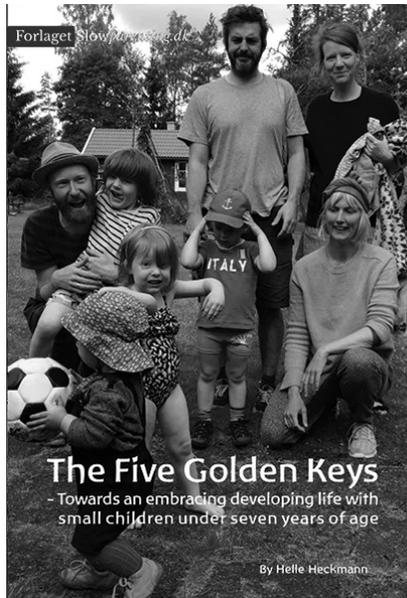
Book Reviews

The Five Golden Keys
– ***Towards an embracing
developing life with small
children under seven years of age***
Helle Heckmann
(Slowparenting, 2020)
Reviewed by Laura Mason

While the world today's children live in is very different from the one their parents and grandparents grew up in, young children's developmental needs remain the same. Helle Heckmann's book *The Five Golden Keys* speaks to us of how to meet the needs of young children in five different ways—through sleep, movement, meals, rhythm and care. This little gem of a book shows us how as adults, we have the opportunity to weave together these five different threads to form a beautiful protective cloth in which to lovingly wrap our children— our own or those in our care.

Each chapter is dedicated to one theme and is followed by journal pages that allow readers to actively take up these topics in their own parenting or caregiving. Questions encourage us to carefully observe, consider what we're doing now, what our hopes are, and what we want to commit to changing.

In the chapter on sleep, we are presented with a picture of well-rested children who feel a sense of well-being and are settled in their bodies. If behavioral challenges arise, sleep may be the first place to look for an underlying problem. Newborns, who come to us with irregular sleep patterns, need our help to find their way to regular sleep rhythms and to develop habits that will lead to a healthy sleep life throughout life. Helle shares what we can expect from children of various ages, talks about the importance of naps and gives us ideas for helpful bedtime routines. She



also emphasizes the importance of healthy sleep for adults caring for young children and encourages us to find ways to care for ourselves in this realm.

In the movement chapter we hear about how independent movement experiences support brain development and strengthen the confidence and stamina of our children. Children who experience unstructured movement are better able to know their own capacities. Stepping in to help too often rather than giving our children the space and time to do things for themselves, even when they are frustrated, can lead to children losing their initiative. Helle helpfully urges us

to see everyday tasks as opportunities for children to practice important skills. Those of you who have worked with Helle will not be surprised to hear that she dedicates a portion of this chapter to taking walks simply for the sake of walking. Helle also touches on the gifts of the garden as a place for purposeful work that children can imitate. And finally, she pushes back on the idea that introducing academics early improves outcomes. Children need to use their bodies to learn!

In the first months of life, children's feedings are ideally experiences of safety, warmth and peace in the arms of caregivers. The introduction of solid food provides an opportunity for socialization at the family table and immersion in family culture through food. In the chapter on meals, Helle shares the importance of having children participate in the many components of mealtime, from food preparation and table setting to clearing up and washing the dishes. She encourages us to be fully present and seated for the full meal, without distractions, and to introduce good table manners through simple expectations and

modeling. She also reminds us to slow down, simplify, and recognize and enjoy the important sensory experiences children can have through food.

The fourth point of focus in the book is rhythm. Here we learn about how critical repetition and predictability are in helping children feel safe and secure enough to meet the world with confidence. While the focus is on the daily rhythm—including components such as meals, potty-time, a daily walk, naps, chores and self-care—we’re also given ideas for working with weekly and seasonal rhythms. Helle encourages us to see our duties at home as a “labor of love” and to bring the type of structure we likely have in our work lives, into the home. This consistent structure will support our children in feeling secure.

The final chapter is on care. Our role as adults is to provide protection for the children, to determine what they are ready for developmentally and to be an “attentive presence” that accompanies them on their journey. Helle imagines us drawing a circle of protection around our children. This circle is very snug when they are babies, but it is continually redrawn as the children get older and need to turn

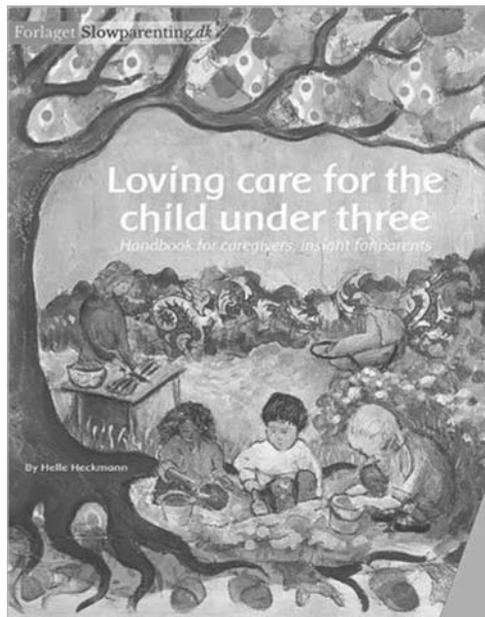
their gaze outward. She uses the term “reverse care” to describe the kind of care we’re giving when we allow children to face appropriate challenges independently. Not rescuing the child from every obstacle is an especially important kind of care! She also encourages us in this chapter to minimize choice. We can care for the children by knowing what is best for them and being clear about our expectations. And finally, we are strongly encouraged to turn off devices in order to be fully present.

Helle closes her book with an invitation to stop and consider how we can truly make the child our priority. A dramatic life change is necessary when a child comes into a family. She hopes we can all recognize the need for this change and embrace it along with all of its challenges.

While this book is a quick read, it is dense with ideas for inspiration. I recommend it for new parents and for educators working with parents of very young children and can easily imagine it being a helpful supplemental resource for parents in parent-and-child groups. Happy reading! ♦

Loving Care for the Child under Three
Helle Heckmann and colleagues
(Slowparenting, 2021)
Reviewed by Heather Church

Almost twenty years ago when I met Helle Heckmann at a conference in Ontario, it was a life-changing experience for me. Helle gave meaning to my life’s experience, my work with children, and the importance of speaking up for the needs of the young child. That moment was the beginning of my journey towards making Waldorf education my life’s work. Over my twenty-some years of working with the young child, Helle has



come into my work life over and over again, inspiring me to move forward. I am honored to share with you Helle Heckmann’s latest publication, *Loving Care for the Child Under Three: Handbook for Caregivers and Insight for Parents*.

Loving Care for the Child under Three is delightful in its physical form, filled with beautiful artwork and photographs. Most importantly it takes the reader on a journey of understanding and caring for the young child from birth to three. The book is a

compilation of a lifetime of Helle's work over the years, and is focused on supporting parents and caregivers. It especially emphasizes this valuable work of caring for the young child in consideration of the realities of our time on the earth. With the support of Rune Ravn Bratlann, Grete Lyngdorf, Robyn Hewetson, and others, Helle Heckmann shares many different aspects of their love-infused work with young children. Beautifully woven into each chapter are the "green pages," stories that deepen the subject of the chapter. It is a sharing of wisdom from Helle's many colleagues, friends, and parents from around the world.

The journey begins with the **Roots**, the inner work of the adults, which forms the essential foundation for caring for the young child. In this chapter Rune Ravn Bratlann, who lives and works in Denmark teaching anthroposophical studies, describes supportive practices of inner work and points to the fundamental task of love in education. Such inner work is essential for our times, for our children and for the future, for the intuitive capacities of the past are no longer available to us. We now have to develop and grow new capacities from the inside.

The first "green story" in the book is Shaunaq Puri's sharing of his journey towards "Finding Fatherhood." Shaunaq shares the highs and lows of his path to becoming a father in this time with incredible honesty and humility. Like the many other stories in the book, it is one that warms the heart.

Next comes the **Trunk**, a time for bringing stability in the first year of a child's life, developing the relationship between the child and the parent or caregiver, as well as the growing connection to the earthly world. This chapter covers subjects such as physical development, sustenance, rhythm, warmth, diapering and sleep. It also touches on budding outer relationships such as that between parent and child, care outside the home, and time outside for walks in nature.

Chapter Three, the **Crown**, looks at the whole picture of birth to three. The content in this chapter is carried by Grete Lyngdorf. Grete is an experienced Waldorf teacher who has worked with children from six to sixteen in home childcare and in Camphill Canada. She currently teaches Gordon Neufeld courses in Denmark. Grete describes this time in a

child's life as the new womb, the new umbilical cord. This is a time when we are actively creating a garden that is supportive to the development of a young child in the home and in the community. Grete shares Six Stages of Attachment as presented by Gordon Neufeld, a Canadian developmental psychologist and author of the book *Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers*.

The green sections in this chapter include "Life as Curriculum: Living Arts as Foundation of Care" by Cynthia Aldinger, and Lisa Bratlann's "About Grandmothering." Lisa begins by acknowledging that she has had three experiences of childhood: her own, her children's, and now her grandchildren's. "Each time I have been allowed to hold a small newly born grandchild in my arms, it has occurred to me more and more what a gift it is to become a grandmother: to be allowed to follow their incarnation process..." Once again, the green sections throughout the book are delightful!

Finally **Speaking and Listening – The Teacher's Greatest Tools** chapter closes the book, written by Robyn Hewet from New Zealand. Robyn has worked around the world as a teacher, a teacher of teachers, and a specialist in speech formation. Robyn takes the reader on a journey through the twelve senses and focuses on the higher sense of hearing. Helle is the writer of the green section this time and speaks about singing with the youngest children.

Beautiful illustrations by Danish artist Lise Meijer lead the reader through the book from chapter to chapter; they add a lightness and feeling of newness to each of the pages.

As Susan Weber says in the opening of the book, "Over and over again through these years, Helle has brought her very personal touch to this work. She is compassionate and respectful in every interaction with others—adults and children—and at the same time, without compromise in her ideals. It is a rare mixture and in my own heart and thoughts, holds her apart. She has led many a teacher and many a parent to a new insight that has been life changing even when the insight has been a painful one to hear—and then further, to accept."

Enjoy the journey! ♦