

## **12 Guiding Principles – Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology**

*Nurturing Human Potential and Optimal Relationships from the Beginning of Life*

Wendy Anne McCarty, PhD RN and Marti Glenn, PhD



### **Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology (PPN)**

Understanding our earliest relationship experiences from the baby's point of view and how these experiences set in motion life patterns has been the intense study of the field of prenatal and perinatal psychology for over 40 years. The field uses this lens to focus on our earliest human experiences from preconception through baby's first postnatal year and its role in creating children who thrive and become resilient, loving adults.

Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology incorporates research and clinical experience from leading-edge fields such as epigenetics, biodynamic embryology, infant mental health, attachment, early trauma, developmental neurosciences, consciousness studies and other new sciences.

### **The Origins of the 12 Guiding Principles**

When Marti Glenn, PhD, approached me in 1999 to co-create the first graduate level PPN degree programs and open the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute, one of the greatest challenges was developing a PPN curriculum that could hold the integrity of this wide-ranging field and that could effectively evolve the

Leading-edge prenatal and perinatal psychology-oriented therapists collaborated in an academic community grant project funded by the Bower Foundation to create a set of principles that arose from decades of PPN findings and clinical experience.



These principles are offered as a beacon to help guide parenting practice, professional practice, theory and research and to support human potential and optimal relationships from the beginning of life. They lay the foundation for a new movement in welcoming and caring for our babies. Everyone has a part to play.

## **The 12 Guiding Principles**

### **1. The Primary Period**

The primary period for human development occurs from preconception through the first year of postnatal life. This is the time in which vital foundations are established at every level of being: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and relational.

### **2. Forming the Core Blueprint**

Experiences during this primary period form the blueprint of our core perceptions, belief structures, and ways of being in the world with others and ourselves.

These foundational elements are implicit, observable in newborns, and initiate life-long ways of being.

These core implicit patterns profoundly shape our being in life-enhancing or life-diminishing directions.

### **3. Continuum of Development**

Human development is continuous from prenatal to postnatal life. Postnatal patterns build upon earlier prenatal and birth experiences.

Optimal foundations for growth and resiliency, including brain development, emotional intelligence, and self-regulation are predicated upon optimal conditions during the pre-conception period, pregnancy, birth and the first year of life.

Optimal foundations of secure attachment and healthy relationships are predicated upon optimal relationships during the pre-conception period, during pregnancy, the birth experience and the first year of life.

### **4. Capacities & Capabilities**

Human beings are conscious, sentient, aware, and possess a sense of Self even during this very early primary period.

We seek ever-increasing states of wholeness and growth through the expression of human life. This innate drive guides and infuses our human development.

From the beginning of life, babies perceive, communicate, and learn, in ways that include an integration of mind-to-mind, energetic, and physical-sensorial capacities and ways of being.

## **5. Relationship**

Human development occurs within relationship from the beginning. Human connections and surrounding environment profoundly influence the quality and structure of every aspect of baby's development.

From the beginning of life, baby experiences and internalizes what mother experiences and feels. Father's and/or partner's relationship with mother and baby are integral to optimizing primary foundations for baby.

All relationships and encounters with mother, baby, and father during this primary period affect the quality of life and baby's foundation. Supportive, loving, and healthy relationships are integral to optimizing primary foundations for baby.

## **6. Innate Needs**

The innate need for security, belonging, love and nurturing, feeling wanted, feeling valued, and being seen as the Self we are is present from the beginning of life. Meeting these needs and providing the right environment supports optimal development.

## **7. Communication**

Babies are continually communicating and seeking connection. Relating and responding to baby in ways that honor their multifaceted capacities for communication supports optimal development and wholeness.

## **8. Mother-Baby Interconnectedness**

Respecting and optimizing the bond between mother and baby and the mother-baby interconnectedness during pregnancy, birth, and infancy is of highest priority.

## **9. Bonding**

Birth and bonding are critical developmental processes for mother, baby, and father that form core patterns with life-long implications.

The best baby and mother outcomes occur when mother feels empowered and supported and the natural process of birth is allowed to unfold with minimal intervention and no interruption in mother-baby connection and physical contact. If any separation of baby from mother occurs, continuity of father's contact and connection with baby should be supported.

Baby responds and thrives best when the relationship with mother is undisturbed, when baby is communicated with directly, and when the process of birth supports baby's ability to orient and integrate the series of events.

## **10. Resolving & Healing**

Resolving and healing past and current conflicts, stress, and issues that affect the quality of life for all family members is of highest priority. Doing so before pregnancy is best. When needed, therapeutic support for mother, baby, and father provided as early as possible during this vital primary period is recommended for optimal outcomes.

## **11. Underlying Patterns**

When unresolved issues remain or less than optimal conditions and experiences occur during conception, pregnancy, birth and the first postnatal year, life diminishing patterns often underlay health issues, stress behaviors, difficulty in self-regulation, attachment, learning, and other disorders over the life-span.

## **12. Professional Support**

These early diminishing patterns embed below the level of the conscious mind in the implicit memory system, subconscious, and somatic patterns. Professionals trained in primary psychology (prenatal and perinatal psychology) can identify these patterns and support babies, children, parents and adults to heal and shift these primary patterns to more life-enhancing ones at any age. When parents resolve and heal their own unresolved issues from their child's pregnancy and birth, their children benefit at any age.

**The Association of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health adopted and endorses the 12 Guiding Principles. [www.birthpsychology.com](http://www.birthpsychology.com).**

**This article comprises excerpts from the official 12 Guiding Principle brochure and position paper:**

McCarty, W.A., Glenn, M., et al. (2008, 2016, 2017). *Nurturing Human Potential and Optimizing Relationships from the Beginning of Life: 12 Guiding Principles*. [Brochure]. Natural Family Living—Right from the Start: Santa Barbara, CA.

McCarty, W. A. and Glenn, M. (2008). Investing in human potential from the beginning of life: Keystone to maximizing human capital. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 23(2), pp. 117-135

**For more information and to obtain the position paper and official 12GP-PPN brochures:**

[www.12guidingprinciples-ppn.com](http://www.12guidingprinciples-ppn.com) Brochures are currently available in English, Spanish, Italian and German. You are encouraged to post and distribute the brochures. For other uses of the 12 Guiding Principles content, please contact [Dr. McCarty](#)

*Wendy Anne McCarty, PhD, RN, HNB-BC, DCEP, was the Founding Chair and Core Faculty, Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology Program at Santa Barbara Graduate Institute and author of Welcoming Consciousness: Supporting Babies Wholeness from the Beginning of Life—An Integrated Model of Early Development. She currently is a global consultant/educator for professionals and*

*families to optimize human potential from the beginning of life and repair of earliest life experiences at any age.*  
[www.12guidingprinciples-ppn.com](http://www.12guidingprinciples-ppn.com) and [www.wondrousbeginnings.com](http://www.wondrousbeginnings.com)

**Marti Glenn, PhD is the Clinical Director of *Ryzio Institute*,** offering professional trainings and intensive retreats to help adults heal adverse childhood experiences and trauma. A pioneering psychotherapist and educator, she was the Founding President of Santa Barbara Graduate Institute, known for its graduate degrees in prenatal and perinatal psychology, somatic psychology and clinical psychology. In her clinical work and trainings, She is an international speaker and trainer, emphasizing the integration of the latest research in behavioral epigenetics, Polyvagal Theory and affective neuroscience with attachment, early development, and trauma.

Both authors are recipients of the *APPPAH Thomas Verny Award* for excellence in the field of prenatal and perinatal psychology and health.