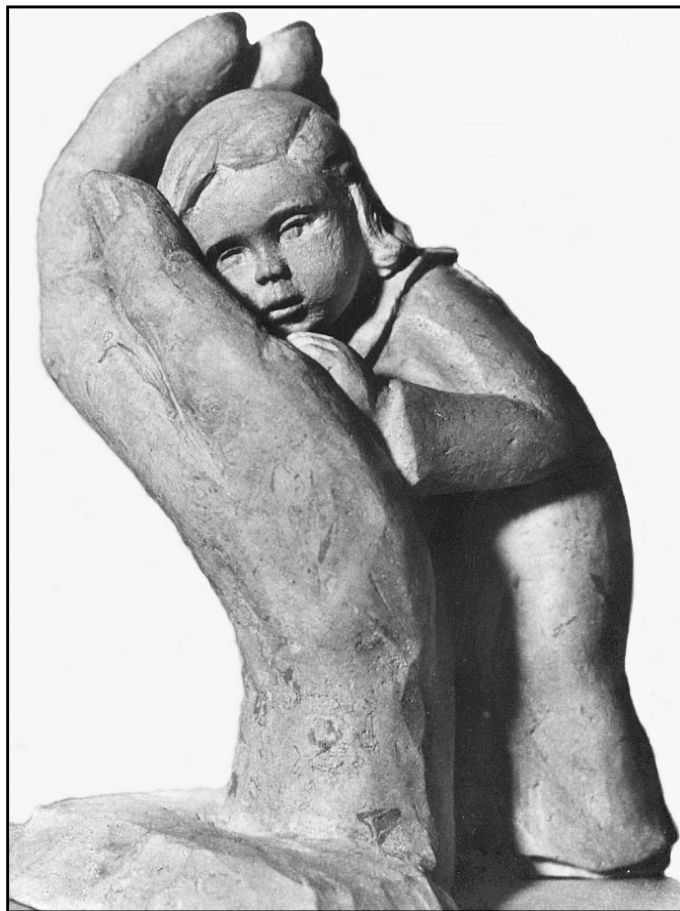


# KINDLING



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THEME: Warmth, Woolly crafts

## WARMTH: A HIDDEN ELEMENT IN A CHILD'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Amanda Knight

I was once dining in a restaurant in Dresden, Germany and I witnessed something that I will never forget. While we were there, we noticed another American couple and their son, David, who was a six-year old student at the International School where I was teaching for the year. David and his parents came over to our table to chat on their way out. When our food arrived, they said goodbye and headed toward the door. Just as they were about to leave, an elderly couple called out to them. We did not understand much German at the time, but it was clear that they were addressing the American family. A young waiter at the restaurant spoke English and he came over to help them to communicate with the couple. As it turns out, the couple had been concerned about David's warmth and they felt that it would be inappropriate for him to go outside without a coat on the chilly evening. It was October and although the day had been quite warm, the air was now cool and a chill could be felt when the door was opened to the outside.

David's parents were not accustomed to receiving parenting advice from strangers, but they politely thanked the couple and it was related that they were planning to run out to the car where they would turn on the heat. This was not satisfactory to the couple and others in the restaurant were beginning to join their cause. They were calm and loving, but also firm. David was not to run out to the car without a coat. It was cold and children should be kept warm. So David's parents ran to the car and the couple stayed with David until the car was heated and pulled up to the front entrance. Then, a man who appeared to be the restaurant owner or manager presented David with a coat. He put it on the child, and the elderly couple walked him out to the car.

David was not the only one who felt warmth on that evening, for I too felt a sensation of warmth. I was surrounded by a community that was concerned about the well-being of others and this was refreshing.



While living in Germany, I experienced firsthand how the ethos of a cultural environment can act as a sheath that provides children with the protection and support that is necessary for healthy development. Young children, bundled snugly in their buggies, were regularly left resting outside of a market while their parents popped in to pick up items for the evening meal. Relationships were created in daily interactions with local shopkeepers and value was placed on maintaining balance in one's life. Mainstream grocers offered only naturally prepared foods free from the dyes,

preservatives, and high fructose corn syrup that have become commonplace elsewhere. Media was present yet it didn't seem to dominate the child's environment, wardrobe, and toy collections. Children played outside in rain and snow, dressing appropriately for the outdoor conditions and then changing into their warm slippers and dry clothes once inside.

When I returned to the United States at the end of that year, I felt that I had suffered a great loss and at the time, I was not sure what it was exactly that I was missing. Several months after my return, I attended a lecture at our local Waldorf School titled, "Warmth: A Hidden Element in Child Development". I was captivated. I listened intently, scribbling notes and nodding my head in agreement. It was one of those "Aha" moments for me. Finally, I had words for what I had been feeling since my return. I was missing the envelope of warmth that radiated throughout the European community where I had lived. Warmth does not permeate modern American society in the way that I had experienced it in Germany. We carry out our daily lives in relative isolation and strangers are not inclined to offer help to one another for fear that danger will arise. In this cold society, it is crucial that we, as parents and caregivers, make a concerted effort to provide young children with the warmth that is so essential to their healthy development.

Indeed, warmth is considered to be one of the greatest gifts that we can give to our children (Johnson). It is particularly important to nourish the physical warmth of young children as they are developing their bodies in the first seven years. Wrapped up in our fast-paced lives, it is easy to find oneself rushing out to the car with a young child in our arms without taking the time to put on a coat and hat. The child might even feel warm to the touch and we justify the action, as David's parents did, in the story above, thinking that it is only a short distance that they will be exposed to the cold.

Young children have an accelerated metabolic rate to support the development of their rapidly growing bodies and they will feel warm to the touch unless they are on the verge of hypothermia (Johnson). When we choose not to insulate their bodies with appropriate layers of natural fibers, we are forcing them to expend energy on warming their bodies that could otherwise contribute to supporting the healthy development of their organs (Johnson).

A lack of physical warmth is also thought to reduce a child's immunity. When children have to use energy to heat their bodies, they have less energy available to fight off infection and they

become more susceptible to germs and viruses (Johnson).

As human beings, we perform comfortably within a narrow range of internal body temperatures. It is only within this narrow range that our "I" can interact properly with the external world. The organization of warmth within our physical body becomes the vehicle through which the will penetrates the body and only then is it possible for us to control our body and emotions (Darcy p.32). Physical body warmth is critical to the developing child and it is important that we take the time to protect them from the cold, both indoors and outside. In doing so, we are laying the foundation for healthy physical development.



In discussing warmth, or the temperature sense, it is important to recognize its two-fold nature. The sense of warmth refers not only to the warming of the physical body, but also to the soul gesture that we experience in our interactions with our environment. Cold temperatures make our bodies contract and in warm temperatures our bodies are able to relax. We react similarly to the soul warmth or coldness that we experience from other human beings in our environment (Patterson and Bradley p.90). A soul response that is cold has a chilling effect and a young child may react by withdrawing into himself. Warmth, on the other hand, has a stimulating effect. A child met with warmth is interested and engaged (Soesman p.95).

Rudolf Steiner believed the sense of warmth to be critical to the development of a child's healthy sense development. Indeed, he believed the temperature sense to be the first sense of man (Soesman p.96). A young child meets the world with interest and this is the essence of the temperature sense. It is the sense that lays the foundation for the development of all the other senses. We have to want to observe something or to hear something and it is the temperature sense that drives this interest that then engages the other senses (Soesman pgs. 96-97). When we open ourselves up to the external world, we either get something back or we get nothing back. When we get something back from the experience, we experience a sense of warmth and we feel a connection to the world (Soesman p.102). It is certainly important that we foster a secure environment in which a child is motivated to radiate and receive warmth.

In a lecture describing the twelve senses that Rudolf Steiner identified, Douglas Erwin offered a visual diagram that organized the senses into three categories: lower, middle, and higher senses.

Warmth is one of the middle senses and it is this group that "give us aesthetic order and let us know that the world is beautiful" (Douglas Gerwin, Director of the Center for Anthroposophy, New Hampshire USA). We must surround the children with beauty so that this is the message that they come to know as truth.

A LifeWays-inspired household or childcare program provides an environment that offers the beauty and security that nurtures the senses in a child. Parents and caregivers in this setting radiate a soul gesture of warmth as they carry out their daily tasks with love and attention. Children are nourished with song and tender touch. An environment is fostered in which children are invited to participate in meaningful work and also offered the freedom to engage in uninhibited imaginative play. The atmosphere is one of care and intention and time is taken to enjoy all tasks, from folding silks to diapering. The children's connection to the natural world is nurtured with time spent outdoors and developing children are nourished with snacks and meals that are prepared with whole grains and organic products. Immersed in such care, children are embraced in an environment of warmth that supports their healthy development.

It has been several years since I have returned from Germany and I now realize that it is possible to create an ethos of warmth within American society. In thinking about starting a family of my own, I hope to create a household that fosters the development of my child's sense of warmth. Further, it is my intention to make an effort to maintain a sheath of warmth for my children in outings that take the family outside of the home. For example, rather than steer my children into crowds of people and open them up to the possibility of a chilling soul gesture, I plan to use a buggy that faces the child toward me or another caregiver.

I believe that it is important to establish a community that is ready to meet and embrace my child. In a society that has become increasingly technological, it may seem difficult to create connections in the community. It is clear, however, that support of a child's sense of warmth is essential and I believe that parents and caregivers should make an effort to form relationships with members of their community. One could do so by choosing to go shopping at the same time each week, selecting the same cashier even if this means a wait. The routine offers security to the child and a relationship will soon be established with regular interactions. When banking, one could make an effort to go inside and work with a teller rather than utilize the cold automatic machines outside. Families can join coops and regularly take advantage of the local farmers' market. In all

outings, it is important to take the time to make positive connections with the people. In forming relationships within the community, we can widen the envelope of warmth that surrounds the child in the home.

In conclusion, it is vital that we pay close attention to the healthy development of the sense of warmth in children, particularly in this modern life where children are susceptible to damaging sensory overload. A young child is sensitive to the soul responses that are around him. We must all strive to surround our children with what is beautiful, what is good, and what is true. How a child experiences the world has a tremendous influence on how the child perceives the world later as a teenager and as an adult (Johnson 1999). Warmth is an essential component to the healthy development of today's children.

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**Amanda Knight** is a graduate of the Maine LifeWays training program.  
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## THE MANTLE OF WARMTH - FREYA JAFFKE

Probably the most comprehensive mantle is formed by warmth, and this applies to all levels. For our physical comfort we ensure we have warm clothes and heated rooms. On another level we attempt to create a soul-warmth, 'an honest, unaffected love ... which as it were streams through the physical environment of the child with warmth (which) may literally be said to 'hatch out' the forms of the physical organs' (R. Steiner, *The Education of the Child*, p.28))

A mantle of warmth is created on a spiritual level if we allow wisdom to rule our thinking, if our thoughts are fully concentrated on the matter in hand and if our actions are based on knowledge of the human being. Rudolf Steiner often says that love is wanting to do that of which one has gained an understanding. (From: *Work and Play in Early Childhood*, p.36. Floris Press.)

## THE WARMTH OF LOVE

Estelle Bryer

There is no greater warmth than Love, and no matter how much one tries to explain it, the dimensions are beyond all comprehension. The mere saying of 'I LOVE YOU' to my two daughters did not do my feelings justice. Therefore, from when they were still young, I tried to extend my expression of it into other dimensions by saying, for instance; 'I love you as much as all the stars in the sky!'

Of course young children are familiar with all the stars in the sky, which they can tangibly see, and of course, they still have a connection to the star world. Therefore saying this to them, and at the same time feeling my accompanying warmth and my reverence for Creation, I felt an amplification of the expression, which of course all passed over to them. Love flowed from me.

Over time I built on this, extending and embellishing in order to meet the children's rich imagination – such as, 'I love you as much as all the grains of sand on the beach; all the blades of grass in the world; all the birds in the air or all the

drops of water in the sea'. Sometimes the children met me with their own contribution, which could be quite funny. All the hairs on the dog, for instance. I tried never to overdo this, so it never detracted from the quality.

This still continues today, even though my granddaughters are now adults. I know it will be a hand-me-down through the generations.

In my talks to parents and grandparents I try to spread this message, having seen the benefits throughout my own family.



### NOTE:

My mother and I still do this today, often with a little giggle. I do the same with my own daughters, filled with the heartfelt love that my mother gave to me!  
Janni (Editor)