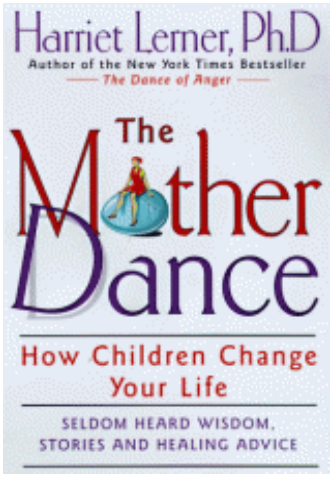
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Mother Dance

by Harriet Lerner



About the Book

Despite wall-to-wall books on parenting, there is a conspicuous silence about the mother's experience of mothering and how her life and relationships are transformed when children come along. This is a book about being a mother-what it does and what it feels like from the inside.

A mother and psychologist, Lerner combines personal tales with vivid examples to explore the complexity, truth, and turbulence surrounding motherhood. She reveals how children are the greatest teachers of life's most profound spiritual lessons, and she offers her best advice to help mothers make sense of an overwhelming experience.

With stories that run the gamut from the hilarious to the sobering, Lerner spells out what happens to a woman-and her relationships-from the time when the first baby comes along all the way to the empty nest.

Discussion Guide

1. Are there "right" and "wrong" reasons for having kids? What are they?

2. How does his new life differ from her new life after the first baby comes along?

3. What changes (from within and without) need to occur to make shared parenting a realistic goal?

4. How is a marriage changed and challenged by the arrival of the first child?

5. What do you know about your own mother's experience of mothering throughout the lifecycle? What stage was the most difficult for her?

6. On raising daughters, Lerner says, "Your daughter is watching you." What did you learn from watching your own mother about what it means to be a wife, a mother, a single parent, a daughter, a friend, a sister, a worker, and, ultimately, a human being? What lessons do you want to pass on?

7. What is a "good mother"?

8. What is the biggest challenge of raising daughters? Of raising sons?

9. Discuss Lerner's comment, "If you're raising a mama's boy, go for it!"

10. Discuss the difference between productive and nonproductive guilt. Discuss fear and worry in a mother"s experience.

11. What do you think are the most helpful messages a mother can impart to her adolescent daughter about sex? About food? Is your answer different for sons?

12. How are kids affected by the "emotional climate" between their parents, married or divorced?

13. Discuss your label, role, or "job description" in your family of origin ("the weak one," "the good one," "mother's best friend"). What roles andlabels do your kids have? At what cost?

14. How can you best foster communication with kids about emotionally difficult issues (illness, suicide, divorce, job loss)?

15. Why is the role of stepmother so difficult? How can you try to avoid the usual pitfalls?

16. What are the biggest challenges a mother faces when her first or last kid leaves home? How is it different if she is single or married?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

" Harriet Lerner pioneers on behalf of women's whole humanity. Each chapter in The Mother Dance is worth the price of admission. "

The Mother Dance
by Harriet Lerner

Publication Date: April 21, 1998
Hardcover: 336 pages
Publisher: Harper
ISBN-10: 0060187689
ISBN-13: 9780060187682