

**'I am a child, so I sense where  
my parents are'**

Keeping you  
and your children  
in a good place.

**Bibi Schreuder**

### Colophon

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**SO I SENSE**

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**WHERE MY**

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**PARENTS ARE'**

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**BIBI SCHREUDER**

Translated by  
Maartje Rosenstok-Schreuder



**To all children and thus to all parents and grandparents  
and to everyone who deals with children.**

**And also to those  
who occasionally want to put their child  
behind the wallpaper.**



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Everywhere there is a shovel in the margin is an exercise to do for yourself



# 1

## Preface

### Children and parents

This book is about children, and that is why it is also about parents.

Because when you are a child, you have a father and a mother (even if they are not known, or are out of the picture or are deceased) and you are only a parent if you have had children. So you cannot be a child without parents, and you cannot be a parent without children ...

Even as adults we are still the daughter or son of our parents. Whether we like it or not, we are part of our family. We are part of our family's history and family system. We are part of many systems like the country where you were born or where you live, the neighborhood you live in, the clubs of which you are a member, your work; we are part of many, many systems.

This book is about children, and that is why it is about adults. A child is not an adult and an adult is not a child. At least ...

I want to invite you to look at children through a systemic lens. With a systemic lens when you look at a child, you see the child within his or her system: you also 'see' his or her parents, his family, the possible history of that family and the entire background of which this child is a part. So when when you look at a child, you also look at adults in that system. It means that when you look at your child, you also see yourself as a child within the system and at the same time as an adult with the 'function' of mother or father. It also means that as a professional, you open up to the possibility that the behavior of children you work with responds to your position in your family system. A systemic lens creates the ability to perceive without judgement. You accept that which you perceive as true, at this moment and in this situation. You allow the phenomena to come to you. With this look you gain a completely different perspective. You see that it is, as it is. And if you accept that without judgement, then something will happen, even without you doing anything ...

This systemic, nonjudgmental phenomenological way of viewing offers insights and space for solutions. And if we dare to observe without acting immediately, instead actively perceiving, without judgement or blame, without fighting against it, without wanting to change what is, then the solutions often come from a completely different angle than we expect.

The systemic way of looking was able to emerge thanks to many insights we have gained from system constellations over the past twenty years (see explanation in frame).

Bert Hellinger (1925-2019) brought us this way of seeing things. He was curious about how social systems worked. By perceiving with this open, curious view through thousands of constellations he developed insights about forces active in each system. He saw that there are different system forces that influence our behavior semi-consciously and unconsciously. Bert Hellinger described these forces as consciences: personal conscience and the collective conscience (which we have renamed 'system conscience') and later he described a third conscience: 'Geist' (Jan Jacob Stam further clarified the concept 'Geist' under the name of evolutionary force).

Even without constellations - if we know how those system forces work - we can look, think and act systemically. Systemic viewing and thinking is sometimes quite a switch, because our Western way of thinking is linear. We often think 'if, then'. We think in terms of cause and effect and above all in terms of good and bad. Apparently having opinions and judgements have a purpose, otherwise there would not be so many opinions and judgements.

Systemically, by having judgements you indicate where you belong and who does not belong. This belonging is one of the systemic principles that significantly influences our behavior.

In addition to this book being about children and adults, it invites you into systemic thinking and viewing with themes in the lives of parents and children and people who work with children, such as teachers and child therapists. They usually came to me with a question about behavior, which they wanted to explore systemically. Sometimes I did a constellation, sometimes a coaching, where I only asked systemic questions, based on a number of principles that make systems function. I am grateful to all who have enabled me to deepen my own understanding through their questions.

## What are constellations?

With a constellation you create a spatial image of a system. This can be your family system, but you can also do an organizational constellation where you can, for example, investigate the relationships between teams.

Elements relevant to the question that someone wants to investigate are set up in the room. Elements may include a father or a grandmother, but can also include abstract elements such as historical events, a country, or an organization goal. People can represent those elements (we refer to them as representatives), but you can also do constellations with figures, or papers and it is even possible to do a constellation in your imagination.

By looking at a constellation, you can suddenly become aware of unconscious patterns. Patterns that keep guiding your life while you actually want to go in a different direction. When you live in the middle of such a pattern, you are owned by that pattern. By viewing the constellation from a distance, you are able to become aware of the pattern and once seen you are free to make your own choices.

Suddenly it becomes clear what your behavior of, for example, 'difficult to tackle new things' is trying to portray: perhaps the painful history of a grandfather who tackled something new, but which ended in bankruptcy with consequences for many ...

So constellations do not provide solutions, but insight. A constellation teaches us to zoom out and to focus on what still needs a place in history.

The facilitator of systemic work with constellations is aware of the working of consciences and he tests, for example by adding elements or by having sentences spoken, where something still wants to be acknowledged in the system.