

# Raffi to share 'child honoring' message at Point Park symposium

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By Ervin Dyer, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

For decades, through his popular children's music and books, Raffi Cavoukian has been practicing what he preaches: That the world can do more for the lives and souls of children.

Now, with his newest book "Child Honoring: How to Turn This World Around," he wants to teach the world about the need for a "compassion revolution."

Child honoring is a philosophy Raffi's developed during the past nine years. It's all about being responsible and committed to bettering the world for all of God's children.

Raffi will share his views at Point Park University today as part of the annual Childhood and Society Symposium, to begin at 7:15 p.m. in Lawrence Hall's third-floor ballroom, Downtown.

This is no new mission for the child advocate. He has dedicated his life to improving the welfare of children and has traveled the world, where he has met and been influenced by Nelson Mandela, Gandhi and the Dalai Lama.

How society, parents and corporations view and treat the very young reveals the degree to which there is a humane and sustainable society, said Raffi.

What the world needs, he said, is a pro-child, pro-family progressive culture that champions recycling, detoxifying the environment, safeguarding fetal and infant development, returning to renewable energy, and using organic foods and material.

"We need to redesign society for the greatest good by meeting the priority needs of the very young," Raffi said in a telephone interview from Toronto yesterday.

Among those priorities is giving every child the right to breathe. This includes freeing youths from asthma.

To Raffi, it also means getting rid of the Ritalin prescriptions and protecting food against pesticides and chemicals. It means, he said, that respect and love should flow not just from the caregiver, but from every sector of society.

"Connecting the dots," he said, "must be personal and planetary."

Raffi, known to millions of young Americans who grew up singing his classic song "Baby Beluga," knows his message will reach people at different points in their lives.

A winner of the United Nations Environmental Achievement Award, the Canadian entertainer maintains that everyone can do something to build a child-friendly world.

Not everyone can move from the inner-city, he said, but everyone can look at a child with love and respect and work to advocate for better child care.

"You do what you can do where you live," he said.

A revolution of compassion, he said, must create conditions that best foster the human potential of every child born in society.

"The wealth of human life is what we want to maximize," he said.

Raffi, who has sold more than 17 million products without direct marketing to children, is one of the first international celebrities to speak out against treating children 2 and younger as a television market.

It is a practice discouraged by the American Academy of Pediatrics, which recommends no screen time for children younger than 2.

Raffi believes it is poisonous to young children's minds and spirits to have corporate outreach zooming into their lives, attempting to addict them on brands to create product loyalty.

It is nothing less than "child hypnosis" and detracts from vital developmental work, while adding to the risk for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and aggressive behavior, he said. He warns parents about shows such as DirecTV's "Baby First TV," a 24-hour channel, and the "Sesame Street" video series aimed at 6-month-olds.

These efforts, he said, are not what children need.

He agrees with environmentalist Rachel Carson that essentially what infants need is to connect with the wonder and magic of the real world without the need for an electronic intermediary.

"There should be no television for children 2 or under," he said.

A little book and a little song best serve the theater of the mind for youth, he said.

And, he added, a little hug doesn't hurt, either.