

Nurture Shock: New Thinking About Children



- By Po Bronson & Ashley Merryman
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You really need to buy this book!



- This summary includes many of the excellent points made in this book, but there is a lot more that I did not cover at the request of the publisher. I respect this request as my goal is to get people interested enough to purchase books rather than just read my summaries. Unless people purchase excellent books like this one, there will be less incentive for people to write and publish them.

The Inverse Power of Praise



- Studies of the effect of praise by Dr. Carol Dweck at Columbia used one group that was praised for being smart and another group praised for their effort. Those praised for effort were willing to challenge more difficult problems. Those who wanted to look smart avoided the risk of being embarrassed. They assumed that failure was evidence that they weren't smart at all. Emphasizing effort gave children a variable that they could control.

Praise needs to be specific.



- Praise also needs to be sincere. Don't assume that students aren't sophisticated enough to see and feel our true intentions. Only children under the age of seven take praise at face value. Students who are falling behind often get drowned in praise. Teachers who criticize students convey the message that they can improve even further. Studies show that Chinese mothers are more critical but they do it in a kind way and smile and hug their children just as much as American mothers.



The Lost Hour

- Around the world, children get an hour less sleep than they did thirty years ago. The cost: IQ points, emotional well-being, ADHD, and obesity. Causes include over scheduling of activities, burdensome homework, lax bedtimes, television and cell phones in the bedroom, home from work after dark parents who want time with their children and don't want to be the hardass who orders them to bed.

Why sleep is really important



- During sleep, the brain shifts what it learned that day to more efficient storage regions of the brain. The brain does synthesize some memories during the day, but they're enhanced and concentrated during the night. New inferences and associations are drawn, leading to insights the next day.
- Sleep deprivation hits the part of the brain harder that is responsible for processing positive or neutral memories. The result is that sleep-deprived people fail to recall pleasant memories, yet recall gloomy memories just fine.

The problem with puberty



- During puberty the biological clock does a phase shift that keeps adolescents up later. Unlike prepubescents and grownups, adolescents don't release the sleep-inducing chemical melatonin until 90 minutes after it gets dark. Schools that have shifted to later start times for high schools have been able to measure performance improvements. They also see higher levels of motivation and lower levels of depression. Teenage car accidents also drop. Schools are scheduled for adult convenience as there is no educational reason to start high schools as early as we do.



Fat chance

- For a long time, television has been blamed for the increase in overweight kids. Obese kids, however, watch no more television than thin kids. Sleep loss increases the hormone that signals hunger and decreases the hormone which suppresses appetite. Sleep loss also elevates the stress hormone which stimulates your body to make fat. Production of the hormone that is essential for breaking down fat is also disrupted. **Children who sleep less are fatter!** If you don't sleep well you will be less active during the day and you can't eat while you are sleeping.



Why kids lie.

- We may treasure honesty, but the research is clear. Most classic strategies to promote truthfulness just encourage kids to be better liars. By age four, 80% of children have started to lie. Most lies to parents are to cover-up transgressions. Parents often fail to censure failed cover-ups showing the child that an attempted lie didn't have any cost. Lying demands advanced cognitive development and social skills that honesty doesn't. If a child increases lying behavior, it is often a symptom of a bigger problem.

Teach that honesty pays.



- Telling kids the George Washington story about how he told the truth about chopping down a cherry tree reduced lying 75% in boys and 50% in girls. Telling them the story about the boy who cried wolf increased lying. In the cherry tree story, George avoids punishment and receives praise. In the Wolf story, kids get the message that you can be punished for lying, which they already know very well. Parents need to teach kids the worth of honesty just as much as they need to say lying is wrong.

The search for intelligent life in Kindergarten



- Millions of kids are competing for seats in gifted programs and private schools. Admissions officers say it's an art: new science says they're wrong, 73% of the time. This is regardless of the test being used or what is being tested. If you picked 100 kindergarteners as "gifted," by third grade only 27 of them would still deserve that categorization. ***The problem is that young kid's brains just aren't finished yet!***



The Sibling Effect

- Kids make about seven times as many negative and controlling statements to their siblings as they do to friends. Only one in every eight conflicts ends in compromise or reconciliation. The other seven times, the siblings merely withdraw, usually after the older child has bullied or intimidated the younger child. Kids don't have an incentive to act nicely to their siblings, compared to friends, because the siblings will be there tomorrow, no matter what. Rage and irritation need not be suppressed and politeness and toleration can be neglected.

The Science of Teen Rebellion



- Out of 36 topics, the average teen lies to parents about 12 of them. Drinking, drug use, and sex are hid the most. The main reasons teens say they lie is to stay out of trouble. They also don't want to disappoint their parents. Many parents believe the best way to get teens to disclose is to be more permissive and not set rules. Permissive parents don't learn more. The kids take the lack of rules as a sign their parents don't care.

Dealing with rules and boredom



- The type of parents who are actually most consistent in enforcing rules are the same parents who are most warm and have the most conversations with their kids.
- Rather than just badgering kids with the message “Don’t Do Drugs,” wouldn’t it be more effective to teach them how else to really enjoy their free time. You need to teach your kids how not to be bored.

For most teens, arguing is the opposite of lying.



- A moderate amount of arguing between parents and children seems to be the best. Parents who listen to their child's argument and make changes to rules if the child makes a good argument are doing the best for the child. Stonewalling or giving in so the child is your friend are not in the child's best interests. Parents tend to find arguing as destructive while children generally find it to be productive. Adults hold on to negativity longer.

Why “good” shows cause bad behavior



- Many educational shows spend most of the half-hour establishing a conflict between characters and only a few minutes resolving that conflict. Preschoolers have a difficult time connecting information at the end of the show with what happened earlier. 96% of all children’s programming includes verbal insults and put-downs. Two thirds have insult lines that would seem cruel in real life. (“How do you sleep at night knowing you’re a complete failure?” from *SpongeBob SquarePants*.) *Very few of the insults are reprimanded or corrected.*

Why is modern parenting failing?



- Spouses express anger to each other two or three times as often and they show a moment of affection to each other. Children are witness to it often and are attuned to the quality of their parents' relationship. Their emotional sense of well-being may be more affected by the relationship between the parents than the direct relationship between parent and child. Parents who pause mid-argument to take it away from the child may be doing more harm as the children don't get to see the resolution.



Spanking and Race

- The more a white child is spanked, the more aggressive she becomes. There seems to be a reverse correlation in black families. In the black community, spanking is seen as something that every kid goes through. In the white community, physical discipline is a mostly-unspoken taboo. It usually happens when the parent is very angry and lost his or her temper. The implicit message is that you have done something so deviant that you deserve a special punishment. In some conservative Christian communities, there seems to be no negative effects from corporal punishment because it is also normal.

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The downside of zero tolerance



- Many incidents where children break the rules involve lapses in judgment which are developmentally normal. Inflicting automatic, severe punishments causes an erosion of trust in authority figures. Kids become fearful - not of each other, but of the rules because they think they will break them by accident. During the era of zero tolerance, levels of anxiety in students have gone up, not down.



The popular “mean” kid

- Most of the meanness, cruelty, and torment that goes on at schools isn't inflicted by “bad” kids. Instead, most of it is meted out by children who are popular, well-liked, and admired. There is also a connection between popularity and alcohol use. Girls are just as aggressive as boys - only they're more likely to use relational aggression. Aggressive kids are more sensitive in order to know when to attack in a subtle manner. They know which buttons to push. They use kindness and cruelty in equally effective ways as tools of power.

Why Hannah Talks and Alyssa Doesn't



- Baby DVDs rely on disembodied audio voice-overs, unrelated to the abstract imagery of the video track. Shows for grown-ups feature live actors where kids can see the actors faces while they talk. This makes a big difference as babies learn to decipher speech partly by lip-reading. This helps them figure out where one word stops and the other begins. If they just hear speech it just sounds like an endless string of gibberish. (Doug: Disney has just announced refunds for Baby Einstein products thanks to this research. Oct. 23, 2009)

Parents need to respond



- The central role of the parent is not to push massive amounts of language into the baby's ears; rather, the central role is to notice what's coming from the baby's mouth, and responding accordingly. How a parent responds right in the moment seems to be the most powerful mechanism pulling a child from babble to fluent speech. Another important thing is to move or twist the objects they are talking about. This so-called "motionese" is important up to fifteen months after which children no longer need motion or can benefit from it. Hearing the same words from different speakers also helps children learn words faster.

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