

Beyond 'Resilience'

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*Please note: this hand-out is intended as a **supplement** to the presentation, not as a **substitute** for the presentation. This handout is NOT intended to be read separately from the presentation; it cannot "stand alone." If you would like to get a sense of the presentation but did not have the opportunity to attend, please read my most recent book **The Collapse of Parenting**. You can reach me via email leonardsax@gmail.com (scroll to the bottom of the document for complete contact information, including address and phone).*

The paradox of modern American parenting: American parents are investing much more time and more money in their kids than ever before, but the outcomes are worse: higher risk of anxiety and depression among American kids, poorer physical health, more kids who are disengaged. I defend this claim at length, with lots of data, in the updated second edition of my book [The Collapse of Parenting](#).

Teenage girls today are more likely to be anxious; more likely to have an eating disorder; more likely to be abusing alcohol; and much more likely to be engaging in NSSI, compared with girls from the same demographic in previous generations. The first graphs I showed, showing a rise in depressive symptoms among teens, are taken from the comprehensive review of current scholarly literature documenting a recent rise in adolescent mood disorders, co-edited by Professor Jean Twenge, online at <https://tinyurl.com/TeenMentalHealthReview>.

Doug Belkin wrote an article for *The Wall Street Journal* on the growing gender gap at American universities, "A Generation of American Men Give Up on College." Click on [this link](#) for full access, even if you do not subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal*. This article also includes the quote from the researcher Douglas Shapiro predicting that within a few years, women will outnumber 2-to-1 at four-year American colleges and universities. Please see my book *Boys Adrift*, second edition, for much more on the growing proportion of American boys who are not working up to their potential. And click on [this link](#) for the 2025 report showing that girls now outnumber boys 2 to 1 among students earning top grades.

The culture of disrespect. The opening chapter of my book *The Collapse of Parenting* is titled “The Culture of Disrespect” – which is a fair summary of contemporary North American popular culture, as experienced by children and teenagers. Proponents of the culture of disrespect include Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, Bruno Mars, SZA, and Drake, among many others.

Drake has had 80 hits on the Billboard Top 10, compared with Taylor Swift at 59, the Beatles at 34, Michael Jackson at 30. For more on why that matters, please see my article for the Institute for Family Studies, “Why Culture Matters,” <https://ifstudies.org/blog/why-culture-matters>.

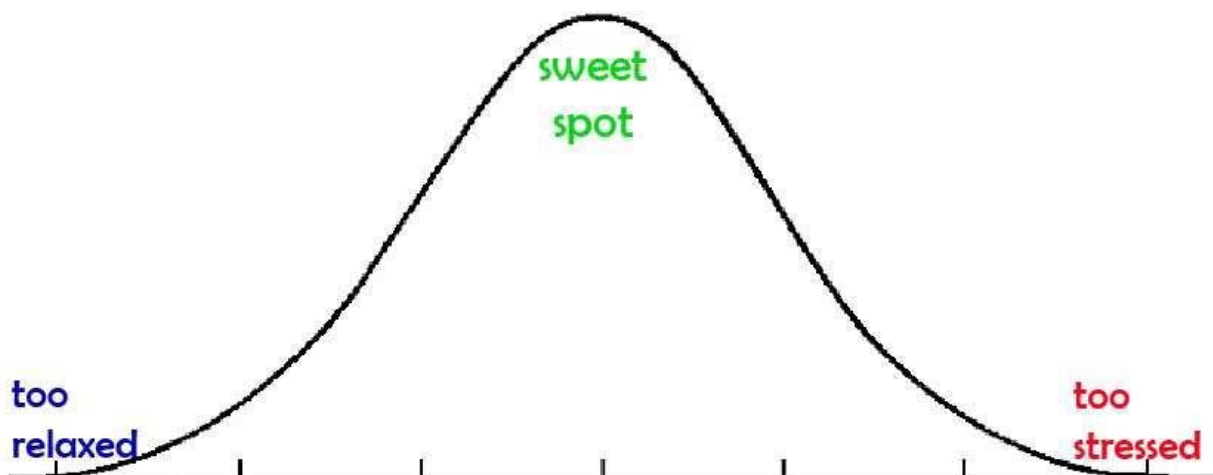
There is good and bad in contemporary American culture. The analogy to the big city. A big city has many great things. But a big city also has dangerous neighborhoods. You wouldn’t let your kid loose in a big city without adult guidance. By the same token, you shouldn’t let your kid loose on the Internet without setting some limits. I recommend that you install a parental monitoring app on ANY device with access to the Internet. The Ethics & Public Policy Center has a useful list of apps, with comments: <https://eppc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/EPPC-Parents-Guide-to-Technology.pdf>.

UCLA study: shift from community to individual. From 1967 through 1997, the most popular TV shows emphasized *community* values, doing the right thing, being a good friend. In 2007, the most popular TV shows – especially reality TV shows – emphasized *individual* values, with a focus on fame, fortune, and winning. See “The Rise of Fame: An historical content analysis,” online at <http://www.cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclanku=2011061601> .

I used to recommend that parents limit social media to less than 30 minutes a day. That recommendation derives from the study by Twenge and Campbell, “Media Use is Linked to Lower Psychological Well-Being,” *Psychiatric Quarterly*, June 2019, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30859387/>. They found an inflexion point between 30 and 40 minutes a day. Use of social media beyond 40 minutes a day was associated with an increased risk of bad outcomes. However, more recent research suggests that TikTok has changed the game. See my article “Is TikTok Dangerous for Teens?” at <https://ifstudies.org/blog/is-tiktok-dangerous-for-teens->. See also Julie Jargon’s article for *The Wall Street Journal*, “TikTok feeds teens a diet of darkness,” read for free at [this link](#). Jean Twenge now thinks the evidence supports a ban on social media for kids under 18. Jonathan Haidt suggests absolutely no social media, as a matter of law, for kids under 16. You can listen to Pat Reidy, Vice President for Mission and Faith at JSerra Catholic High School, interview my daughter Sarah about social media at <https://www.jserra.org/lion-life/podcast/detail/~board/plugged-in-with-pat-reidy-podcast/post/teen-culture-with-dr-sax>.

Michel de Montaigne wrote to the Lady Diane de Foix, advising her to bring up her son “roughly and dangerously . . . on a fractious horse . . . against a tough opponent sword in hand.” That quote comes from his essay *On Education*, which originated as a letter to the Lady Diane de Foix, written in 1580.

The Yerkes-Dodson curve (my rendering):



Resilience can mean “robust” or “adaptive.” You want your child to be adaptive, which is to say UnFragile.

The willingness to fail is the key to success. “Moving from one failure to the next with no loss of enthusiasm.”

Being UnFragile means transforming:

- 1) **Fear** into prudence
- 2) **Pain** into information
- 3) **Mistakes** into initiation
- 4) **Desire** into undertaking

(from Taleb, *Antifragile*, p. 157)

By the year 2000, there was broad agreement among researchers that authoritative parenting yields the best outcomes for kids.¹ But in the years before her death in 2018, Baumrind was concerned that the term she had invented way back in 1966, “authoritative parenting,” was being watered down. “The wide endorsement of authoritative parenting has been accompanied by a definitional drift away from its original meaning,” she wrote.² Many parents – and even many researchers – have begun to act as if there is a tension between “strict” and “loving”: that you can be *either* strict *or* loving, but not both. But Baumrind’s research proved that notion to be wrong.

The parents whom she found to be authoritative parents were *both* strict *and* loving.³ The mistake being made by many parents, and even by many researchers, Baumrind wrote, was in “equating high control with low love and positioning authoritative parenting midway between love and control.”⁴ On the contrary, authoritative parenting as defined by Baumrind is characterized by being *both* “power assertive” (her phrase) *and* high in love, unconditional love. She criticized researchers who believed that unconditional *love* means unconditional *acceptance*.⁵ You can love your child unconditionally, she insisted, while still correcting your child’s mistakes and insisting that your child abide by the rules. If you are not enforcing the rules – if your kids regard you as loving but not strict – then you are permissive.

So what is the right kind of stress? For a 6-year-old: a dog park. For a teenager: how about a 30-day hike through the Wind River Wilderness of Wyoming? I mentioned the hike my daughter did, <https://www.nols.edu/en/coursefinder/courses/wind-river-wilderness-WRW1/>, need-based scholarships are available. Or a summer job working at a greasy spoon at the Jersey shore. I mentioned Katie Roiphe's article, "Teens need real jobs, not elite internships," available [here](#) even if you are not a WSJ subscriber.

I mentioned the book by Robert Bly and Marion Woodman, *The Maiden King*, and The Great Disappointment when you realize your dream isn't going to come true.

"Gentle Parenting" means letting kids decide, based on the premise that there are "no bad kids." I cited Janet Lansbury, "3 reasons kids don't need toilet training (and what to do instead)," <https://www.janetlansbury.com/2014/08/3-reasons-kids-dont-need-toilet-training-and-what-to-do-instead/> For a secular critique of gentle parenting, see Jessica Winter, "The harsh realm of 'gentle parenting'," *The New Yorker*, March 23 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/the-harsh-realm-of-gentle-parenting>.

As I noted, "gentle parenting" is not consistent with Scripture. I quoted Genesis 6:5 / Genesis 8:21, "the desire/inclination of the human heart is evil from youth."
Proverbs 16:32: "Greater is he who can govern his own spirit than he who takes a city."
Psalm 19:13 "May they not rule over me."
Genesis 4: "sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must/can/shall govern/master it." Same Hebrew root in all these verses. *m-sh-l*

When I visited the Shore School in Australia, I met with Dr. Wright. I asked him: what is school for? He answered: it is preparation for life. I asked him: what is life for? He answered: life is for three things:

- ***Meaningful work***
- ***A person to love***
- ***A cause to embrace***

I am not saying that Dr. Wright is the guru. You don't have to embrace his answers. But you must have an answer.

Why are so many girls and boys today more likely to be anxious, depressed, and/or fragile? My answers:

- ⊙ Parents have allowed American culture to break the bonds across the generations
- ⊙ **You can change that**
- ⊙ American culture now prioritizes fame and wealth over virtue and character
- ⊙ **You must challenge that**
- ⊙ The collapse of American parenting has set kids adrift in a toxic culture that celebrates instant gratification, Live for Now
- ⊙ **You must offer an alternative culture in which it's cool to be self-controlled**

Here are some comments about my books:

Why Gender Matters “. . . is a lucid guide to male and female brain differences.”
New York Times

Boys Adrift “. . . is powerfully and persuasively presented. . . Excellent and informative references and information are provided.”
Journal of the American Medical Association

Girls on the Edge: “Packed with advice and concrete suggestions for parents, *Girls on the Edge* is a treasure trove of rarely-seen research on girls, offering families guidance on some of the most pressing issues facing girls today. Dr Sax's commitment to girls' success comes through onevery page.”
Rachel Simmons, author of Odd Girl Out

Girls on the Edge: *“This is essential reading for parents and teachers, and one of the most thought-provoking books on teen development available.”*

Library Journal

Girls on the Edge: *“The best book about the current state of girls and young women in America . . . offers astonishing and troubling new insight . . .”*

The Atlantic

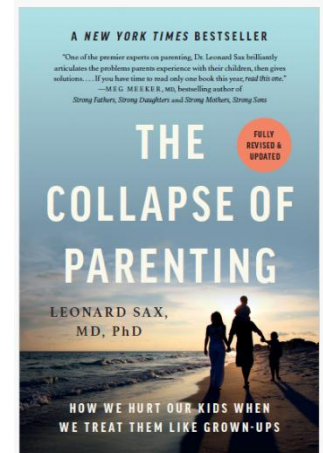
The Collapse of Parenting: *“One of the premier experts on parenting, Dr. Leonard Sax brilliantly articulates the problems parents experience with their children, then gives solutions. **The Collapse of Parenting** is academic but practical, simple but deep. If you have time to read only one book this year, **read this one.**”*

Meg Meeker MD, author of **Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters** and **Strong Mothers, Strong Sons**

The Collapse of Parenting: *“With years of experience and research working directly with parents and children, Dr. Leonard Sax provides an important glimpse into parenting in modern times, where it’s gone wrong, and how to fix it. Being a parent has never been more important and Dr. Sax explains how to avoid parenting pitfalls and raise your children well.”*

Bill Bennett PhD, former US Secretary of Education

The Collapse of Parenting: *“A comprehensive breakdown of where parents have gone awry and how they can get back on track to teach virtue and character to their children. Sax provides a series of easy-to-follow solutions that help bring parents and children back to the same page, working toward a healthier, more respectful, and conscientious attitude. With the author’s solid advice, parents have a good shot at achieving these goals.”* Kirkus Reviews



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Notes on Baumrind:

¹ For example, in his 2001 presidential address to the Society for Research on Adolescence, Laurence Steinberg said:

Studies of American samples show that as a general rule, adolescents fare better when their parents are authoritative, regardless of their racial or social background or their parents' marital status. This finding has been confirmed in samples from countries around the world that have extreme diversity in their value systems, such as China, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Scotland, Australia, and Argentina.

Quoted in Diana Baumrind, "Authoritative Parenting Revisited: history and current status," in Robert Larzelere and Amanda Sheffield Morris and Amanda Harrist (editors), *Authoritative Parenting: synthesizing nurturance and discipline for optimal child development*, American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 11.

² Baumrind, 2013 (previous note), p. 12.

³ See for example Baumrind's article, "The impact of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance abuse," *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, volume 11, pages 56 – 95, 1991. Although these findings are not well-known to many American parents, this article has been influential among scholars; as of April 2025, it has been cited in more than 8,500 other articles, according to Google Scholar.

⁴ Baumrind, 2013, p. 13.

⁵ Baumrind, 2013, p. 13. The researcher Baumrind is criticizing here is Alfie Kohn and his book *Unconditional Parenting: moving from rewards and punishments to love and reason* (Atria, 2005).