



The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids

Madeline Levine

I could kick myself for missing Madeline Levine speak at Skyline high school in January. Ironically, it was because I was running my over-scheduled kids to practices and rehearsals that I couldn't make it work. And to be honest, I had not heard about Madeline Levine and was not familiar with her work. I am now. From the moment I picked **up *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids***, I have been unable to put it down or to stop talking about it. In this important book, Levine exposes how a culture of affluence is creating unhappy kids, who are driven for results but who lack a sense of self, internal motivation or self-efficacy. Levine not only illustrates misguided parenting practices, but provides thoughtful alternatives toward helping parents raise kids who are successful emotionally, socially and personally.

At the end of most parenting books, I am happy if I come away with one or two nuggets of wisdom. In this book, I have highlighted and starred nearly every page. After an introduction of anecdotal evidence of kids who are really struggling, despite coming from intact, affluent homes where parents play an active role in kids' lives, Dr. Levine explains why money can't buy happiness. One of the key points in this section is that parents of affluence are often so busy making sure that kids are never disappointed in their quest for high standards that we forget to teach our kids the values of perseverance and persistence. "What they really need is to be educated about the values of perseverance and perspective, and to understand that learning and performance is not always the same thing. They need to see that their parents value effort, curiosity and intellectual courage." P. 57 Because parents are unwilling to let kids struggle, fail or feel frustrated, kids are unable to cope when they inevitably face them.

Further, Levine prompts parents to reflect on whether or not they are actually parenting the child they have, or, alternately, parenting toward some ideal or forgotten personal dream. I am guilty of letting my parenting be controlled by imagined external pressure and guiltier still of parenting my

own losses through my child. “Being attuned to the needs of your particular child is one of the greatest contributions to the healthy psychological development of that child that you can make.” P. 34. We need to slow down, be present for our children and really listen to them, instead of prescribing a quick fix, rushing in to solve the problem or continually pushing for excellence as measured by grades only.

True warmth and acceptance have nothing to do with how your child does and everything to do with who your child is. Unconditional love means that our hearts are full enough and open enough to accept our children as the startling, unique creates that they are, even as we work to polish their rough edges, help them cultivate interests and talents, and encourage them to be good, responsible, productive people. P. 145

Levine goes beyond just pointing out the flawed focus on performance over learning, and external over internal motivation, she provides practical strategies for relaxing and connecting with the child, as well as a comprehensive definition of a healthy self, including the importance of independence and autonomy for our kids. I was particularly moved by her focus on an “internal home” built out of self-liking, self-management and self-acceptance so that in those most difficult and painful moments of life, people are able to take care of themselves and see themselves through to the other side.

The book truly moved me to reexamine my parenting and to have a longer view of my child than the pressure cooker of high school. We get caught up in “keeping up” and also in the false belief that if we can assure our children will be financial successful, they will also be happy. Not only is there no data to support this, we sacrifice the immediate for some hope in the future and in doing so endanger our children’s emotional well-being and sense of self-worth in the here and now. Levine encourages us to reflect, but also to acknowledge the places you have gone wrong. To that end, I have officially apologized to my eldest for “redirecting” her toward Spanish and away from ASL because I feared colleges wouldn’t see it as rigorous. Had I been a more reflective parent, I would have seen how well my compassionate, outgoing, theatrical child would have done in the class and how with those skills and her passion for the topic and for people would have served her and the world well. An apology doesn’t fix it, but it does admit my humanity. I will hope to do better by the next two. In the meantime, I am busy reading the sequel to Dr. Levine’s book, **Teach Your Children Well** and will review it next month.