

Fall IDA Book Club-directions, questions and key points

10/15, 11/19, 12/17

9:45-10:45

Nature Meets Nurture: Science-Based Strategies for Raising Resilient Kids by Stacey N. Doan and Jessica Borelli

10/15 Introduction and Chapters 1-3

11/19 Chapters 4-6

12/17 Chapters 7-10 and Epilogue

Questions to think about when reading this book:

- 1) How has parenting changed over time? How is parenting a function of larger social - cultural norms and expectations?
- 2) In what ways does parenting reflect the way in which the parent was raised? How can we interrupt the intergenerational transmission of negative parenting behaviors?
- 3) What sort of assumptions do we hold about what infants are like at birth? How does it affect how we parent?
- 4) What does it mean to be a "good" parent? Is this definition universal, personal, cultural?

Chapter 1 Parenting, Stress, and the Shaping of Children's Biology

- Experiences within the parent-child relationship affect the child's developing stress biology.
- Exposure to moderate levels of stress can help children learn how to cope with stress.
- Exposure to negative, uncontrollable experiences of stress or adversity can have long-lasting effects on children's development.

Chapter 2 The Challenges of Contemporary Parenting

- In a competitive society, an increasing number of parents are overinvolved in children's lives, which leads to increased levels of stress.
- Managing stress in our own lives helps us to be a better parent.
- Be aware of stress reduction strategies that work for you! Develop those strategies.

- The absence of stress is not the presence of joy. Create moments of “daily uplifts” in your life.
- Mindful parenting means to be aware of how the stress situation is serving as a trigger, learning to pause so that you can respond instead of react, and considering your children’s viewpoint even if it is different from yours.
- Acknowledge and talk about your feelings with your child. Apologize and repair if you need to.

Chapter 3 Love and Resilience

- Love is powerful and lays the cornerstone for resilience.
- Conceptualizing love as a series of actions rather than as a feeling can be useful for parents. We can acknowledge that, as parents, we sometimes feel stress, resentful, and even irritable, but we can still behave in loving ways toward our children.
- Our family history, time, and stress levels can all affect our ability to parent effectively.
- Empathizing with our children is important, but we also need to avoid letting their challenges overwhelm us.

Chapter 4 Parenting Before Birth

- Babies can learn in utero, including developing taste preference and recognizing the sound of their parents’ voices.
- Some research suggests the experiences that grandparents went through can affect their child’s outcomes.
- Mom’s experiences of stress do matter, but, at the same time, the data are mixed, and it is likely that moderate amounts of stress may even be beneficial for the baby. So, in other words, it’s okay to be a little bit stressed!

Chapter 5 Laying The Foundation: The Early Years

- The brains of newborns are plastic, malleable, and affected by the type of inputs they are exposed to.
- For newborns, touch is a powerful way to support, stimulate, and sooth.
- Mirroring the baby’s emotions, following their gaze, and taking the time to reflect on what the baby may be thinking, feeling, and experiencing are important strategies that help foster positive development.
- The newborn stage is also a time when fostering a stable and predictable environment is crucial. Stability and predictability can mean being consistently available to meet the baby’s emotional and physical needs as well as having regular family routines.
- This period of development is also an important time to reflect on our parenting philosophies and dive into the philosophies of other adults who are engaged in the care of our children.

Chapter 6 In The Mind's Eye: Mentalizing And Empathy

- One of the important skill sets parents need to have is to be able to “read” their children’s thoughts and to empathize with their children’s emotional experiences.
- The process of understanding children’s mindsets is challenging because (a) they don’t always know exactly how they think or feel, (b) they may not be very good at conveying their big emotions and complex thoughts, and (c) they start to learn to hide their emotions and thoughts.
- The OPEN framework provides a process by which parents can begin to understand their children’s experience: *O* equals reflect on one’s own emotion and response; *P* equals pause in heightened moments of stress, take a moment to pause, and pay attention to both your and your child’s emotions; and *N* equals understand that most experiences are new experiences for your child that are free of encumbrances from the past and don’t always let how your child has responded before shape your understanding of how they are responding now.

Chapter 7 Tempering The Tantrum: Regulating Children’s Negative Emotions

- It’s not simply stressful events that impact our health and well-being but also how we respond to these events that matter.
- Children have big emotions that they need help controlling.
- Children’s brains are not fully mature; parents must act as the child’s CEO. As CEO, we need to help children deal with their stress and be aware of the range of strategies that exist because every child is different-just as every stressor is not experienced the same.
- In helping deal with children’s emotions, acknowledging and respecting their lived experiences comes first.

Chapter 8 Capitalizing On Children’s Positive Emotions

- Helping children downregulate their emotions is important, but the absence of negative emotion does not mean the presence of positive emotion.
- A host of research studies suggest that positive emotions help us be creative, promote well-being, and recover from stress.
- We can use strategies to upregulate our children’s positive emotions, teach them gratitude, give them opportunities to help others, and help them to capitalize and savor positive experiences.

Chapter 9 Nurturing Your Child’s Nature

- Children are born with innate characteristics and quirks that affect their development and how people respond to them.
- Temperament can be described along three main dimensions: (a) activity level, (b) moodiness or emotional reactivity, and (c) distractibility/persistence. Understanding where your child falls along these dimensions is helpful for your understanding of how you should parent.

- Your temperament (nature) and your child's temperament affect how you parent (nurture)!

Chapter 10 The Coparent

- Human children are often raised by multiple caregivers. While this is beneficial most of the time, it also requires much more cooperation and coordination.
- The coparenting relationship is distinct from the relationship between the two parents and also distinct from the relationship between parent and child. Although two individuals may have a fantastic relationship before children, or when children are not involved, the coparenting relationship (how the two work together on raising their child) can be strained. Data suggest that relationships undergo increased challenges and strain right after the birth of a child.
- The first step to promoting high-quality coparenting relationships is intentionality. One aspect of this intentional mindset involves conceptualizing coparenting as separate from couple/marital relationship quality. Parents must tend to this aspect of their relationship separately and deliberately (e.g., setting aside time to talk about it just like they set aside time to talk about their couple relationship or talk about parenting)
- The second step is to identify what the coparents' shared and unique values are for parenting. These values can be based in culture, religion, history, politics, science, literature, intuition, morality, education, personal beliefs or history, or any other belief system that the parent holds.
- Prioritize your values. Check for overlap. Being explicit about the shared values and goals can help to navigate conflicts and to identify areas of compromise.