

Introduction

- Acronym: PARENT
 - Play – why free play creates happier, better adjusted, more resilient adults
 - Authenticity – why honesty creates a stronger sense of self. How praise can be used to form a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset, making your children more resilient
 - Reframing – why reframing can change you and your children’s lives for the better
 - Empathy – why understanding, incorporating, and teaching empathy are fundamental in creating happier children and adults
 - No Ultimatums – why avoiding power struggles and using a more democratic parenting approach fosters trust, resilience, and happier kids
 - Togetherness and Hygge (Coziness) – why a strong social network is one of the most important factors in our overall happiness. How creating hygge (coziness) can help us give this powerful gift to our children
- Parents wrote us saying they loved the idea of focusing on play, empathy, and social skills – not just academics – as crucial elements to educating a child
- Danes are very happy because of their upbringing
- The Danish philosophy behind parenting and their way of raising children yields some pretty powerful results: resilient, emotionally secure, happy kids.
 - The legacy repeats itself, and we get a society that has topped the happiness charts for more than forty years in a row
- Remember that parenting is your legacy
- Happy kids grow up to be happy adults who raise happy kids, and so on

Chapter 1: Recognizing Our Default Settings

- Many parents are excessively competitive with themselves, with their children, and with other parents without even realizing it
- This excessive competitiveness is part of what it is to be an American
- Changing your natural behavior or default setting is especially hard in difficult moments
- **Our default settings are the actions and reactions we have when we are too tired to choose a better way**
- Most of our default settings are inherited from our parents
 - They are ingrained and programmed into us like a motherboard on a computer

Chapter 2: P Is for Play

- We mean “play” in which they are left to their own devices, with a friend or alone, to play exactly as they see fit, for as long as they want
- Play often seems like a waste of valuable learning time
- Do we make our kids more anxious by putting them in all these activities where they have to perform?
- **What if we told you that free play teaches children to be less anxious?**
 - It teaches resilience, and resilience has been proven to be one of the most important factors in predicting success as an adult



- The ability to bounce back, regulate emotions, and cope with stress is a key trait in a healthy, functioning adult
- We now know that resilience is great for preventing anxiety and depression, and it is something the Danes have been instilling in their children for years
- Children should first and foremost be children and play
- Play helps our children learn resilience and develop a strong internal compass to guide them through life
- For what is a math genius without the ability to cope with life's up and downs?
- As they see it, if children are always performing to obtain something – good grades, awards, or praise from teachers or parents – then they do not get to develop their inner drive
- Internal vs. External Locus of Control
 - In psychology, this internal cheerleader or drive is known as the locus of control
 - People with an internal locus of control believe that they have the power to control their lives and the things that happen to them
 - Their drive is internal, or personal and their place of control comes from the inside
 - People with an external locus of control believe that their lives are controlled by external factors such as the environment or fate, which they have little influence over
 - What drives them is coming from the outside, and they cannot change it
 - The difference between internal and external locus of control is how much we feel we can control our lives
- Studies have shown that children, adolescents, and adults who have a strong external locus of control are predisposed to anxiety and depression
- Self-esteem comes from an internal locus of control
- In Denmark, parents try not to intervene unless it is absolutely necessary
- If children feel too pressured, they can lose the joy in what they are doing, and this can lead to fear and anxiety
- Play is crucial for learning how to cope with stress
 - The more kids play the better they become at learning social skills and engaging in social/play contexts
 - And the better they become at coping
- Resilience is not cultivated by avoiding stress, but by learning to tame and master it
- Since children fundamentally want to play with each other, these situations require them to practice getting along with others as equals – a vital skill for happiness in later life
- So, the next time you see your children swinging from the branches, jumping off some rocks, or play fighting with their friends and you want to intervene to save them, remember that this is their way of learning how much stress they can endure
- The more they play, the more resilient and socially adept they will become
- Playing alone is extremely important for kids
- Avoid intervening too quickly ...
 - Sometimes it is learning how to deal with the more difficult children that provides them with the biggest lessons in self-control and resilience



Chapter 3: A Is for Authenticity

- Watching tragic or sad movies actually makes people happier by bringing attention to some of the more positive aspects of their own lives
- It tends to make people reflect on their own relationships with gratitude and perspective, leaving us feeling enriched and more in touch with our own humanity
- Danes believe that tragedies and upsetting events are things we should talk about too
 - We learn more about the character from our suffering than from our successes
 - It also helps us feel gratitude for the simple things in our lives we sometimes take for granted
- **This inner compass, authentic self-esteem based on values, becomes the most powerful guiding force in one's life, largely resistant to external pressures**
- **Being a model of emotional health is powerful parenting**
- Children may learn to do things for external recognition rather than for internal satisfaction, which becomes a default setting for life
 - It encourages extrinsic goals: needing something outside themselves to make them happy
- The Danish Way of Authentic Praise
 - This value of humility is about knowing who you are so well that you do not need others to make you feel important
 - The way we praise our children does have a profound effect on resilience
- Fixed Mind-Set vs. a Growth Mind-Set
 - Praise is closely connected to how kids view their intelligence
 - If they are constantly praised for being naturally smart, talented, or gifted (sound familiar?), they develop what is called a "fixed" mind-set (their intelligence is fixed and they have it or do not)
 - In contrast, children who are told that their intelligence can be developed with work and education develop a growth mind-set (they can develop their skills because they are working very hard)
 - Kids with a fixed mindset are afraid that by needing to really try hard to do something they will lose their status as "smart"
 - Kids with a growth mindset tend to care about learning
- The Key to Lifelong Learning and Success
 - Growing research in psychology and neuroscience also supports the idea that a growth mindset is the real catalyst for outstanding achievement
 - You must have worked hard on solving these problems
 - Those that are praised for effort will learn to think it was something you can develop with work rather than a fixed thing
 - Fixed mindset children think success is being innately smart so struggling means they are not
 - Their self-image is so tied up in their scores that they are reluctant to admit failure
 - Growth mindset adjusted scores upwards only 10% of the time



- **Praising students for their intelligence does not give them the motivation or resilience crucial to being successful, but can instead give them a fixed mindset full of vulnerability**
- **In contrast, effort, or process praise – praise for engagement, perseverance, strategies, improvement, and so on – fosters motivation and resilience**
- It is the ones who can tackle a task with perseverance and resilience, incorporating colleagues with gratitude, who will ultimately get the sought-after position – and even make it to CEO status
- Tips for Parents
 - Be nonjudgemental. This kind of honest relationship, if fostered well, will be paramount during the teenage years
 - Keep the praise focused on the process or effort children put in rather than on innate abilities
 - That it is the perseverance, not the innate ability that matters most
 - By focusing on the effort involved in learning, we create a growth mindset
 - Teach children not to compare themselves with others

Chapter 4: R Is for Reframing

- It was about using the language to create a perception shift
- **Many of us are unaware that how we see things is an unconscious choice**
- Danes teach their children this invaluable skill, and learning how to reframe early helps them grow up to be naturally better at it as adults
 - No Danes do not pretend that negativity does not exist
 - They point out in a rather matter-of-fact way that another side also exists that you may never have even considered thinking about
 - Realistic Optimists
 - Being in touch with reality but focusing on the more positive angles is much more in line with being a realistic optimist
- The Skill of Reframing
 - Reframing is seen as a key trait in resilience
 - A person's level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails
 - The ability to reframe negative situations is a key element to being resilient
 - Numerous studies show that when we deliberately reinterpret an event to feel better about it, it decreases activity in areas of the brain involved in the processing of negative emotions and increases activity in areas of the brain involved in cognitive control and adaptive integration
- We feel what we think
- How Reframing Works with Children
 - Reframing with children is about the adult helping the child to shift focus from what she thinks she can not do to what she can do
 - The more of these statements' children hear, the more negative conclusions about themselves they make
 - The language we use is extremely powerful



- It is the frame through which we perceive and describe ourselves and our picture of the world
- The Power of Labels
 - So much of what we think about ourselves as adults comes from the labelling we were given as children
 - Many of us continue to live up to and compare ourselves with these labels unconsciously for the rest of our lives
 - When they hear a plotline repeated about their lives, they begin to associate themselves with these labels and draw identity conclusions from them
 - These narratives become their life story, and it is very hard to get out of them
 -
- Thus, reframing or reauthoring is not about eliminating negative events in our lives
 - Rather it is about placing less importance on them and focusing more on the aspects we do like
- Labels as we have seen can become a self-fulfilling prophecy
- Tips for Reframing
 - Pay attention to your negativity
 - Everything we see and say negatively about ourselves, our family, and our anxieties and fears passes directly on to our kids, so give the gift of reframing to yourself and your children and help them become better at coping with life's ups and downs
 - Use less limiting language
 - Use less judgment and more acceptance, and you will find yourself in fewer power struggles with your kids and your partner

Chapter 5: E Is for Empathy

- Always approach your kids and partner with understanding and forgiveness rather than eye-rolling and exasperation
- **Empathy is the ability to recognize and understand the feelings of others**
 - It is the ability to feel what someone else feels – not only to feel for him but to feel with them
 - Simply put, it is walking a mile in someone else's shoes
- Narcissism is an inflated view of the self, which tends to separate the self from others and to inhibit the formation of meaningful relationships
 - The characteristics of narcissists are such that people focus on themselves so much that they lose focus on caring about other people's needs
- The Heart of America: Survival of the Fittest
 - For many years in the United States, it has been believed that humans, like nature, are fundamentally selfish, aggressive, and competitive
 - This began with the Industrial Revolution.
 - The structure of the market economy as well as the financial, legal, and political systems are at least partially based on this notion, which essentially pits people against one another



- For so long, evolutionary theorists, politicians, and the public have focused on competition and the ruthlessness of natural selection as the way humans are wired
- It has essentially built the foundation for the individualism that defines being an American
- Competition and striving to be number one are part of what defines being American
- Our Fear of Vulnerability and the Discovery of the Social Brain
 - The broad brush of judgment is swiped across someone else, and poof, all of your choices become superior and you are obviously a better parent, and that feels good
 - Because being the best is a value we treasure highly
 - The cruel irony is that we would feel a lot better to have a connected social network in which we could feel supported, not judged
 - **What if we tried a little more vulnerability and empathy instead of shaming others?**
 - What if we stopped aiming for a perfection that does not exist?
 - What if we tried to be more connected?
 - We are wired not only for self-interest but also for the welfare of others
 - This means that people get more pleasure from the happiness of others than from their own happiness!
- The Truth About Empathy
 - **So many of our governing policies have been based on the belief that nature is a “struggle for life” and that we ought to build our societies on competition and selfishness rather than the full spectrum of what it means to be human**
 - From an evolutionary standpoint, empathy is a valuable impulse that helps us survive in groups
 - Humans could not have survived without empathy and solidarity
 - Contrary to popular belief, most of us do care about the welfare of others
 - This impulse has just been lying dormant due to lack of focus
 - **What many do not realize is that we are biologically predisposed to connect to others**
 - We survive because we can communicate and collaborate
 - Empathy facilitates our connection to others
- The Responsibility of Parents
 - Parents have a big responsibility because they are the primary example of empathy and must practice being empathic themselves
 - Therefore, what they experience in the home will be crucial for their empathy development
 - Children from overprotective families are often the ones who grow up more prone to narcissism, anxiety, and depression
 - They are not allowed to self-regulate because of the mismatch between feeling and action
 - By pointing out the good in others, it becomes natural to see the good in others
- Empathy enhances the quality of meaningful relationships, which we know is one of the most important factors in our sense of well-being
 - Empathetic teenagers are shown to be more successful because they are more purpose-driven than their more narcissistic counterparts
- One of the pillars in the Danish way of teaching empathy is not judging



- Meaningful friend and family relationships are the most important factors determining true happiness, well above having a lot of money

Chapter 6: N Is for No Ultimatums

- “It is better to conquer yourself than to win a thousand battles” --- Buddha
- Parents who spank are generally just operating from their own default settings based on their upbringing, which is typically quite physical
- Four Parenting Styles:
 - Authoritarian:
 - These parents are demanding and not responsive
 - They want obedience and have high standards – the classic tiger mom
 - Children of authoritarian parents tend to do well in school but sometimes suffer from low self-esteem, depression, and poor social skills
 - **Authoritative:**
 - **These parents are demanding but responsive**
 - **They set high standards as well but are supportive in their discipline**
 - **Children of authoritative parents are rated more socially and intellectually competent than those of other parents**
 - Permissive:
 - These parents are highly responsive but seldom demand mature behavior from their children, depending instead on self-regulation from the child
 - Children of permissive parents tend to have problems in school and with their behavior in general
 - Uninvolved:
 - These parents are neither responsive nor demanding, but not to the point of being neglectful
 - Children of uninvolved parents do most poorly in all areas
- Authoritarian parents typically parent this way because it is how they were raised and they feel they turned out fine
- Children who are spanked may feel depressed and devalued
 - Their sense of self-worth can suffer
 - Kids learn to listen because they are afraid
 - Not surprisingly, one of the most common long-term consequences of spanking is aggression
- The parenting style used in Denmark is very democratic
 - That is, they establish rules and guidelines that their children are expected to follow
- **First and foremost, I think we must remain calm as parents and try not to lose control of ourselves**
- Firmness and kindness can replace losing your temper and going into immediate power struggles and ultimatums
- Parenting with Respect
 - A strong sense of core self comes from questioning and understanding what rules are and why they exist, and then truly incorporating them and valuing them



- You will have a much more positive influence and a genuinely closer relationship if you foster an atmosphere of respect and calmness in which there is no fear of blame, shame, or pain
- In fact, studies show that children from authoritative parents are more likely to become self-reliant, socially accepted, academically successful, and well-behaved
 - They are less likely to report depression and anxiety, and less likely to engage in antisocial behavior such as delinquency and drug use
 - Research suggests that having even one authoritative parent can make a huge difference
- In Denmark, they devote a lot more time and energy to thinking of how to avoid problems rather than how to punish for them
- How you choose to see children makes a big difference in your reaction to them
 - If you see them as naughty and manipulative, you will react accordingly
 - If you see them as innocent and doing exactly what they are programmed to do, you are much more likely to react by nurturing and forgiving them, even helping them rather than punishing them
 - Patience is much more easily summoned when one sees the harmless intentions and goodness in an otherwise annoying child
 - **Good begets good. Calm begets calm**
- Chill Out and Remember the Big Lines
 - Most parents simply repeat their own patterns
 - This is what you have to decipher and decide with your partner when the big lines need to be enforced
 - Remember, kids go through phases in which they do not want to do/eat/wear/say certain things
 - Kids are testing things for themselves as well
 - Teaching a child to enjoy and respect food is a great gift
 - Food is what sustains us, and having a healthy, loving relationship to it can create a lifetime of happiness
 - Low stress makes everything uncharged, especially food
- **Best advice ever: Get more sleep. Breathe. Exercise more. Get some time away!**
- Children are supposed to push boundaries and test the rules.
 - They are not bad and manipulative
 - This is how they grow
- Guide them, nurture them, and educate them
 - Do not just punish them and see them as needing more discipline
- Remember: The cycle comes back to you
 - Good begets good
 - Bad begets bad
 - Out of control begets out of control and calm begets calm



Chapter 7: T is for Togetherness and Hygge

- Good teams become great ones when the members trust each other enough to surrender the “me” for the “we” --- Phil Jackson
- Research shows that one of the top predictors of wellbeing and happiness is quality time with friends and family
- Because Danes see hygge as a way of life, they all try to make a cozy time together with family and friends happen
- Feeling connected to others gives meaning and purpose to our lives, and this is why the Danes value hygge so highly
- The American Bedrock
 - The United States was built on the philosophy of self-reliance
 - We glorify individual achievement and self-fulfillment with terms such as “the self-made man” and idolize the individual hero in all walks of life from political to social to sports
 - It is the hard work and the survival of the fittest we admire most
 - The U.S. has the highest level of individualism in the world
 - We are so programmed to think about I that we probably do not even realize it
 - We are more programmed to think individualistically
 - We all strive to win recognition for something
 - It is woven into the very fabric of our culture
- When You Substitute, We for I, Even Illness becomes Wellness
 - The concept of togetherness and hygge has many implications, but essentially it is putting yourself aside for the benefit of the whole
 - It is leaving the drama at the door and sacrificing your individual needs and desires to make a group gathering more pleasant
- Teamwork in Denmark
 - Danes also encourage humility in their star pupils, so they will be empathic and care about others
 - Excellent team player is the thing they strive for
 - They help others to help themselves, and they are humble even when they are stars
 - And who does not appreciate a humble star?
 - This spirit of teamwork and cooperation is seen in all aspects of Danish life
 - The immune systems of people with lots of friends simply works better
 - A strong social life helps the immune system stay strong

