

This is a beautifully written, accessible book that describes an approach to parenting—“balanced parenting”—that will help parents do a better job raising their kids, even in the face of adversity. And, unlike many fads and fashions in parenting that come and go with the times, these authors’ recommendations are grounded in decades of solid, scientific research. I love this book!

—**LAURENCE STEINBERG, PhD**, DISTINGUISHED UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR OF
PSYCHOLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE AT TEMPLE UNIVERSITY,
PHILADELPHIA, PA; AUTHOR OF *YOU AND YOUR ADULT CHILD:
HOW TO GROW TOGETHER IN CHALLENGING TIMES*

An excellent addition to our understanding of the role that both adverse and protective childhood experiences play in the development of resilience. I highly recommend this balanced approach to parenting to anyone raising children, and especially those who either had adverse experiences in their own childhood or who are parenting children who had them.

—**MICHAEL H. POPKIN, PhD**, COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY; FOUNDER AND
PRESIDENT, ACTIVE PARENTING PUBLISHERS; AUTHOR OF *THE ACTIVE
PARENTING PROGRAMS*

Amanda Sheffield Morris and Jennifer Hays-Grudo provide parents with a compelling and engrossing introduction to the scientific research on parenting. They explain how balanced parenting, which involves age-appropriate levels of warm support and limit-setting, best promotes resilience and illustrate this approach concretely in relation to children of different ages, including those who have experienced adversity. Sheffield Morris and Hays-Grudo are both developmental psychologists as well as parents who use their varied experiences and expertise to maximal effect.

—**MICHAEL E. LAMB**, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY AND FELLOW,
SIDNEY SUSSEX COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, CAMBRIDGE,
ENGLAND; EDITOR OF *PSYCHOLOGY, PUBLIC POLICY, & LAW*

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INTRODUCTION

The hardest and most important job that any of us will ever have is being a parent. It is especially challenging when your own childhood was less than ideal. More than half of parents today experienced physical or emotional abuse, neglect, divorce, family violence, alcohol or drug abuse, or mental illness in their homes when they were children or adolescents. In the last 20 years, scientists have learned that these adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, have lifelong consequences on physical health, mental health, and parenting. No parent wants to continue this pattern of adversity, but it is often difficult to know how to break the cycle. In this book, you will learn five essential steps to breaking the intergenerational cycle of adversity. Breaking this cycle is not easy. It involves reflecting on your past and making changes in yourself and how you parent. This book is your guide as you chart a new course, creating a home that supports your child's growth and well-being along with your own.

We all want our children to have a happy childhood. We also want them to have a childhood that prepares them to thrive in a world of adversity. In other words, we want them to be resilient. Raising resilient children is a matter of balance: giving them freedom to explore while keeping them safe, allowing them independence while staying connected, and letting them make mistakes while helping them

succeed. We call this *balanced parenting*. It focuses on the parent–child relationship, keeping in mind the competing demands of children’s development and parents’ need for control. Certainly, there are many situations in which parents should be in control. But just as important, children need opportunities to learn and grow and become independent.

This book provides strategies for managing these balancing acts. You will learn effective ways to discipline your child, communicate better with your adolescent, and establish routines and habits in your family that naturally build children’s character and resilience. Along the way, you will also become more resilient, be better able to handle your emotions and control your reactions to difficult situations, and create the life you want for you and your family.

This book is for all parents, especially those who have experienced childhood adversity or whose children have a history of trauma. We use the term *parents* throughout the book, but we acknowledge that all families are different. Parents can be mothers, fathers, step-parents, or grandparents, and many other people play important roles in children’s lives. We believe you will benefit from the knowledge and experiences we share in this book at any stage of parenting—whether during pregnancy, infancy, early childhood, the teenage years, or when becoming a grandparent. We encourage you to read all the chapters, no matter your age or the age of your child. There are helpful tools and strategies for managing stress and adversity throughout the book, and you will benefit from thinking about how to promote resilience and healing at all ages and stages across the life span.

Some psychologists believe you cannot be resilient unless you have experienced trauma or significant hardship. How can you show evidence of resilience if you have never experienced adversity? While there is logic in this argument, we believe that individuals can build the capacity for resilience whenever adversity occurs. All of us will experience adversity at some point in our lives because life is hard.

If it isn't today, chances are it will be tomorrow. In this book, we focus on ways to help our children and ourselves build the potential for resilience so we are prepared when adversity comes.

We are developmental psychologists who have studied parenting, adversity, resilience, and child development for multiple decades. We have also learned many lessons from raising our own children. We have drawn on our experiences and scholarly knowledge in writing this book. We share many of the challenges we had as parents, with the permission and blessings of our children.

We recognize as developmental psychologists that parenting should differ for children at different ages. While many of the principles of good parenting are the same across ages, the emphases and strategies that work best need to change as children grow and develop. You will see in this book that we have separate chapters for parenting children at different stages of development. We begin every chapter with a story. We include practical tips, zooming-in boxes that give a little more detail on the research on child development, and recaps and activities to help you digest and use the information presented in this book. We also include Parenting Strategies for Building Resilience, proven strategies that help you and your child get from one stage to the next. Each chapter includes information on how parents' and children's exposures to trauma can lead to parenting and developmental challenges and how to create age-appropriate protective experiences to counter those effects. We provide activities to bring the parenting strategies and trauma recovery lessons to life. One of the most important things we have learned in our research is that pretending that hardship, trauma, or adverse experiences never happened is the least effective path to recovery—for adults as well as for children. Traumatic experiences do not need to be relived to be acknowledged, but they must be acknowledged to be healed.

We recognize that this book is based on our knowledge, experience, and understanding of parenting. Many families experience the

intersection of racism, discrimination, poverty, illness, adversity, and other significant hardships. We acknowledge that the perspectives we share in this book are limited and biased despite our best efforts. We share many perspectives but also have our own views and have had different life experiences. Our goal is to blend and harmonize these perspectives into a coherent set of guidelines with examples from our experiences as parents and researchers. This book is the result of our desire to share what we have learned.

We live in a world of adversity. Today, parents face new challenges, such as protecting children from harmful online content, limiting their screen time, dealing with the availability of lethal and highly addictive drugs, and increasing pressures to succeed in school despite limited options for many young adults. It is not yet known what the full extent of the COVID-19 pandemic will be on this generation of children and adolescents. To be sure, we expect there will be some enduring effects, much like there were for the children of the Great Depression who were raised in the 1930s. We truly hope that some of the long-term effects of the pandemic will be positive and protective in times of future adversities. We must remember that the children who grew up during the Great Depression became known as the “Greatest Generation” for their resilience and grit. It is our hope that by reading this book, parents and future generations will benefit from understanding the many different pathways to promote resilience in themselves and their children despite what is going on in the world.

We use the analogy of a road trip throughout this book. Parenting is an epic journey with many twists and turns, detours, roadblocks, and obstacles along the way. So, get ready for this amazing trip. Pack your bags, get your map and compass, buckle your seat belt, and set out for this great adventure. It is sure to be a memorable ride—full of adventure, discovery, and resilience.