

**Chris' Notes: *Nurture Shock***  
**By Po Bronson & Ashley Merryman**

- Introduction
  - The central premise of this book is that many of modern society's strategies for nurturing children are in fact backfiring.
- The Inverse Power of Praise
  - 85% of parents think it's important to tell their kids that they are smart
  - Carol Dweck- Growth mindset vs Fixed mindset- Emphasizing effort (instead of ability) gives a child a variable they can control. Of those praised for their intelligence, 90% ended up choosing an easier task- the name of the game becomes: look smart, don't risk making mistakes
  - To be effective, praise needs to be specific (number of shots in hockey)
  - Frequently praised children get more competitive and more interested in tearing others down- Image maintenance becomes primary concern
  - Students turn to cheating because they haven't developed a strategy for handling failure. A child deprived of the opportunity to discuss mistakes can't learn from them.
- The Lost Hour
  - ½ of all adolescents get less than 7 hours of sleep per night. Only 5% get 8 hours. Kids get an hour less sleep each night than they did 30 years ago.
  - A loss of one hour of sleep is equivalent to the loss of 2 years of cognitive maturation and development (measured in Wechsler Intelligence Scale)
  - Every hour of weekend shift (in sleep patterns) costs a child 7 points in IQ
  - Sleep disorders can impair a child's IQ as much as lead exposure
  - A tired brain gets stuck on a wrong answer and can't come up with a more creative solution. It cannot synthesize vocabulary as well.
  - Sleep deprived people fail to recall pleasant memories- yet recall gloomy memories just fine.
  - Dropping below 8 hours of sleep doubled the rate of clinical-level depression.
  - Children who sleep less are fatter than children who sleep more.
- Why White Parents Don't Talk about Race
  - It takes remarkably little for children to develop in-group preferences once a difference has been recognized. Children will use whatever you give them to create divisions. It takes years, however, before their cognitive abilities allow them to successfully use more than 1 attribute to categorize anything.
  - It's possible that by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, when parents usually recognize it's safe to start talking about race, the developmental window has already closed.
  - Studies found that the more diverse the school, the more the kids self-segregate by race and ethnicity within the school.
  - The odds of a white schooler in America having a best friend of another race is only 8%.
  - Explicitness works.

- In an ironic twist, the more a culture emphasizes individualism, the more the high school years will be marked by subgroupism.
- Why Kids Lie
  - People simply cannot tell when kids are lying. They believe girls are telling the truth more than boys, when in fact boys do not lie more often. They believe younger kids are more prone to lying, whereas the opposite is true. And they believe introverts are less trustworthy, when introverts actually lie less often, lacking the social skills to pull off a lie.
  - Kids grow into lying. Lying is an advanced social skill.
  - Asking a child “before you answer me, will you promise to tell the truth- I will not be upset with you if you broke the rule, and I will be really happy if you tell the truth” cuts down lying by 25%. A six year old wants to make his parents happy.
  - Kids learn that honesty only creates conflict, while dishonesty is an easy way to avoid conflict.
  - Parents are 10 times as likely to chastise a student for tattling as lying
- The Search for Intelligent Life in Kindergarten
  - Almost 7% of American public school kids are in a gifted program.
  - All of the tests used are ‘astonishingly ineffective predictors of a young child’s academic success’ If you picked 100 kindergarteners as gifted, only 27 would still deserve the definition.
  - Testing after 3<sup>rd</sup> grade may be more accurate. IQ tests given in middle schools are actually very good predictors of academic success
  - *Many schools are still laboring under the premise that intelligence is innate and stable. (chris’ emphasis)*
  - Motivation correlates with academic success almost as well as intelligence does.
  - It needs to be recognized that no current test or teacher ratings system used on young kids meets a reasonable standard of confidence to justify a long-term decision. None of the critical mechanisms of intelligence are yet operational at the age most children are taking a test for entry into a gifted program.
- The Sibling Effect
  - According to traditional theories, children with siblings should be massively more skilled at getting along with others than children with no siblings. Yet they aren’t. Perhaps kids learn just as many poor social skills in interactions with siblings as good ones.
  - In studies, kids made 7 times as many negative and controlling statements to their siblings as they did to friends.
  - What predicts a good relationship with siblings later in life is a ‘net-positive’- the good times more than balance out the bad.
  - What works is teaching conflict *prevention*, not conflict *resolution*. *(their emphasis)*. Teaching kids to recognize the feelings they are broadcasting.
  - Many ‘pro-social’ books about sibling fights actually teach kids novel ways to be mean to a sibling.
  - 75-80% of kids fights are about sharing physical possessions.

- More emphasis needs to be placed on skill-building
- The most predictive factor of how well 2 siblings get along is the quality of the older child's relationship with their best friend. Older siblings train on their friends, then apply what they know to their little brothers and sisters.
- Getting what you want from a parent is easy. It's getting what you want from friends that forces a child to develop skills.
- The Science of Teen Rebellion.
  - Out of 36 potential topics, the average teen lies to her parents on 12.
  - Drinking, drug use, and sex lives are the things they hide the most. They really object of the motional intrusiveness of these topics.
  - Direct lies are used to cover up the worst stuff. Other things, parents only hear half the story, or doesn't bring it up at all.
  - 96% of teens in this study reported lying to their parents. Being an honors student doesn't change the numbers much, nor does being busy/overscheduled.
  - They lie to protect their relationship with their parents. They don't want parents to be disappointed in them.
  - Permissive parents don't actually learn more about their child's lives.
  - Most rules-heavy parents don't actually enforce them all. It's too hard.
  - It's essential, for the kids, to have some things be 'none of your business.'
  - The objection to parental authority peaks around age 14 or 15.
  - Rules-heavy parents sometimes create psychological intrusion into kids lives- their kids don't rebel, they get depressed.
  - The type of parents who are the most consistent in enforcing rules are the ones who have the most conversations with their kids. They set a few rules over certain key spheres of influence and explain why the rules are there. They support their child's autonomy and ability to make decisions.
  - The research team also confirmed that bored kids do more drinking and drugs. But we need to teach them how to use their free time.
  - Boredom starts to set in at 7<sup>th</sup> grade and increases through 12<sup>th</sup>. Intrinsic motivation also drops.
  - The more controlling a parent, the more likely for the child to be bored.
  - Teens brains tend to react less/not at all to smaller rewards, and then react hugely to big rewards- it's like a seasoned drug addict.
  - At the very moment when experiencing an emotionally-charged event, the teen's brain is handicapped in its ability to gauge risk and forsee consequences (PFC)
  - In the abstract, teens can evaluate risks, but in exciting circumstances, the brain gets overridden by the reward center.
  - Certain, seemingly small risks, like getting turned down for the dance, terrify teens far more than adults, but other, seemingly large risks, like driving dangerously, they see as smaller.
  - Certain experiences they *feel* like what it would be like to have your musical tastes displayed for all to see, but others they don't, and it takes them longer to deliberate.

- Arguing, from the teen perspective, is seen as a good sign. 46% of mothers rated arguments as destructive, but only 23% of the teens did. The key variable, for the teen, is how the arguments are resolved. The kids need to feel heard, and, when reasonable, the mother needs to budge.
- Can Self Control Be Taught
  - Driver's ed doesn't make teens drive better, because their accidents are caused by poor decision skills.
  - DARE, in all studies, shows no comparative reduction long-term.
  - Tools of the Mind is a program that does help kids make good decisions, and they get better test scores.
  - In 'tools' classrooms, they create 'play plans' to help develop executive function.
  - Being able to concentrate is a skill that might be just as valuable as math, reading, or even raw intelligence
  - These researchers cannot emphasize enough how crucial it is for children to develop an awareness of how well they're doing and when their work is completed accurately. This sensitivity is required for the brain's feedback loops to function, and for concentration to increase.
  - *The motivated brain, literally, operates better, signals faster. (Chris' emph)*
  - There is now a consensus of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of self-regulated learning on academic achievement, as well as on learning motivation.
- Plays well with others.
  - Despite our preconceived notions, the more educational media children watched, the more relationally aggressive they were. Most of these shows spend most of the ½ hour establishing a conflict, only a few minutes resolving it.
  - There are an average of 7.7 put downs in a children's 'pro-social' tv show
  - Of the 2,628 put downs, only 50 instances had the insulter being reprimanded or corrected.
  - Spouses express anger to each other 2-3 times as often as they show a moment of affection. Children appear to be highly attuned to the quality of their parent's relationship.
  - Letting children witness, not just the argument, but the resolution, is important. Arguments can be intense, but if they're resolved, the kids are ok.
  - We have an oversimplified view of aggression in our culture. Aggression is not simply a breakdown of social skills, but rather many aggressive acts require highly attuned social skills to pull off.
  - Kindness and cruelty are equally effective tools of power. The trick is achieving just the right balance.