

The Collapse of Parenting

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*Please note: this hand-out is intended as a **supplement** to the presentation, not as a **substitute** for the presentation. This handout is NOT intended to be read separately from the presentation; it cannot “stand alone.” If you would like to get a sense of the presentation but did not have the opportunity to attend, please read my second book **Boys Adrift**, especially chapters 3 and 8; also my third book **Girls on the Edge**, especially chapters 1, 2, and 3; and my most recent book **The Collapse of Parenting**. You can reach me at mrcad@verizon.net but please also send a copy to my personal email leonardsax@gmail.com.*

Jean Twenge and colleagues, “Birth cohort increases in psychopathology among young Americans, 1938–2007: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of the MMPI”, *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30:145-154, 2010. Full text online at <http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/MMPIchangeCPR.pdf>.

Jean Twenge’s research on the rise in anxiety among teenagers over the past five decades is presented in an accessible format in her books *Generation Me* (Free Press, 2007) and *The Narcissism Epidemic* (Free Press, 2010).

In the past ten years, the social media have displaced the diary. It is now unusual to find a child or teenager who *regularly* writes in their diary.

Mike Stefanone: girls post 5 times more photos on their Facebook page than boys do; and the girls are more likely to point the camera at themselves. Michael A. Stefanone, Derek Lackaff, and Devan Rosen, “Contingencies of self-worth and social-networking-site behavior,” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14:41-49, 2011.

The more Facebook friends you have, the more pressure you feel to post something every day. Facebook pushes kids – especially girls – to value acquaintances above close friends (*Girls on the Edge*, chapter 2). See also Stephen Marche, “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?” *The Atlantic* magazine, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/8930/. Girls are also more likely to Photoshop their photo than boys are.

Most girls present themselves in a positive light on social media. But most girls don’t realize that the other girls are doing the same. That may be one reason why girls are more likely than boys to experience toxic effects from social media.

I recommend that parents deploy programs such as NetNanny, WebRoot and CyberPatrol.

Parents need to tell their kids that **it is the parent's job** to be aware of how much time their kids are spending online, and which sites they are visiting.

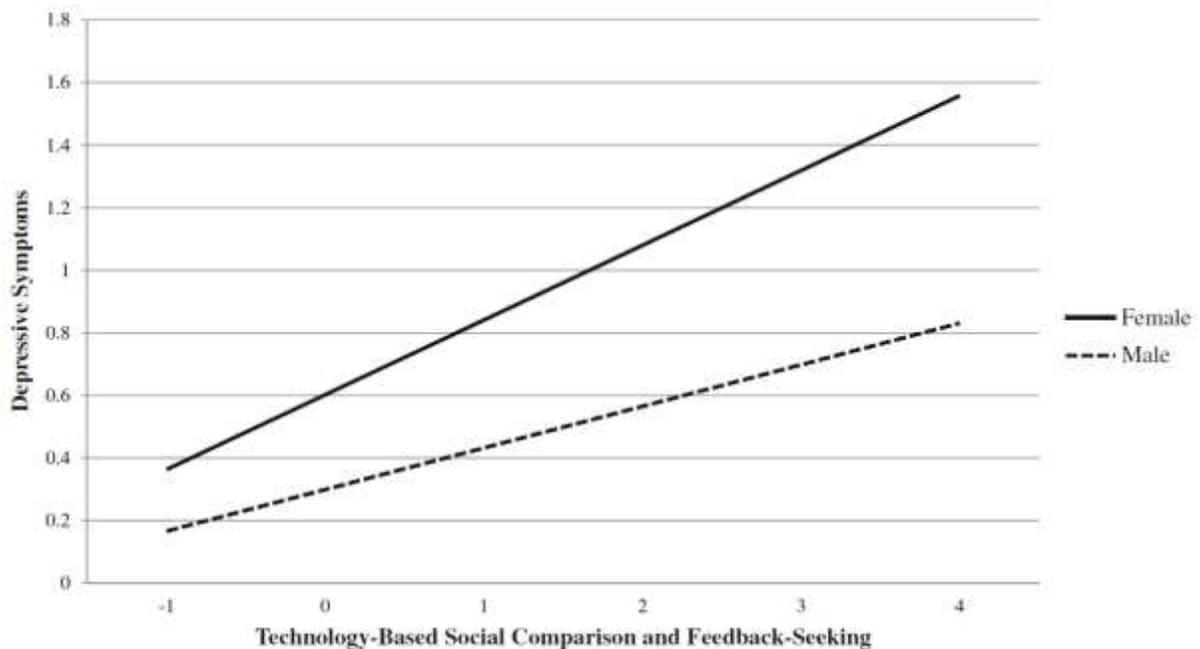
No devices in the bedroom! – i.e. no UNSUPERVISED Internet access.

The latest guidelines on use of media from the American Academy of Pediatrics are available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2013/10/24/peds.2013-2656.full.pdf>.

You should take the mobile devices away from kids at 9 pm (the latest) and plug them into the charger. The charger stays in the parent's bedroom.

Girls appear to be more vulnerable than boys to the toxic effects of social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Boys are far more likely than girls to become addicted to video games and to online pornography.

Jacqueline Nesi and Mitchell Prinstein, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 2015:



Most popular video game for girls: Candy Crush.

Most popular video games for boys: *Grand Theft Auto*, *Call of Duty*, *Halo*, *World of Warcraft*

Playing video games has little effect on academic achievement below a threshold of 6 hours per week. Beyond that threshold, there is a negative and roughly linear effect.

“Displacement.”

Video games tend to shift motivation away from the real world, to the virtual world.

In a large, prospective, longitudinal cohort study, Professors Craig Anderson and Doug Gentile found that boys playing violent M-rated games – particularly games which deployed a *moral inversion* – exhibited changes in personality over a period of 3 or more **years**. They become

more selfish, more hostile, and less patient. Douglas Gentile, Craig Anderson, and colleagues, “Mediators and moderators of long-term effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior,” *JAMA Pediatrics*, volume 168, pp. 450 – 457, 2014.

Consequences of playing video games include:

- Attention problems
- Inappropriate risk-taking
- Obesity and overweight

Attention deficit. The most popular video games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call of Duty* offer constantly-changing challenges, scenes, and characters. Often there are multiple characters on the screen. The successful player must continually be scanning up, down, and sideways for new assailants. Sustained concentration on a single item is a recipe for defeat: you didn’t respond to that rustle on the right of the screen which was your only clue to an impending ambush. Distractibility is rewarded. Not surprisingly, researchers find that the more time you spend playing video games, the more likely you are to develop difficulties maintaining sustained concentration on a single item. Conversely, researchers find that boys who already have difficulty concentrating and focusing tend to gravitate to video games, where their distractibility is an asset rather than a liability.¹

Risk-taking. The world of video games is unreal. You can jump off a 20-foot ledge onto the concrete pavement below and continue chasing your enemy: no sprained ankle, no broken bones. You can race your car at high speeds, crash into a wall, and walk away unharmed from the wreck of your car. You can hijack a car in *Grand Theft Auto* – in fact you *have* to hijack a car in order to play the game. Not only is risky behavior allowed in games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call of Duty*, risky behavior is required and rewarded. If you jump off that high ledge to chase after your opponent, you are much more likely to succeed in killing your opponent than if you “waste” valuable time by running down the stairs instead. Not surprisingly, researchers have found that adolescents who play these risk-glorifying games are more likely to engage in dangerous driving behaviors such as speeding, tailgating, and weaving in traffic; they are more likely to be pulled over by the police; more likely to be in automobile accidents; and more willing to drink and drive.² In another study, teens who were playing risky racing video games at age 17 or 18 were more than three times as likely, 5 years later, to have been involved in an actual car crash, compared with teens who did not play such games.³

Obesity. Boys who spend lots of time playing video games are more likely to become fat compared with boys who spend less time playing video games.⁴ There seem to be at least two mechanisms operating here. First, playing video games exercises your thumbs but burns less calories than many other activities, such as playing actual sports. Secondly, and less intuitively, playing video games seems to have a direct appetite-stimulant effect, worse than watching TV.⁵ That may be why time spent playing video games is significantly more likely to be associated with obesity and other bad health outcomes, compared with time spent watching TV.⁶

Anderson and Gentile have created the following guidelines, based on their research:

Video games (Craig Anderson, Doug Gentile)

- 1) No more than 40 minutes/night on school nights**
- 2) No more than 1 hour/day on weekends / vacations**
- 3) No games rated M**
- 4) Is a moral inversion present?**
- 5) Is violence depicted as fun, or funny?**
- 6) Are real-world consequences of violence lacking from the game?**

Sexting (rare) and Not-Quite-Sexing (common)

Pediatrics, September 17 2012: Rice et al., “Sexually explicit cell phone messaging associated with sexual risk among adolescents”, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22987882>.

Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Jeff Temple and colleagues, “Teen sexting and its association with sexual behaviors”, <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1212181>.

Not-quite-sexting (*New York Magazine*, “They Know What Boys Want”, January 30 2011)

For parents: I recommend parents install either mymobilewatchdog.com or Net Nanny Mobile for most smartphones. This program, and others like it, can send every photo taken with a cell phone IMMEDIATELY to parent’s laptop and/or cell phone. Programs like these give your daughter an excuse to say NO.

No child under 13 years of age should have a smartphone. That doesn’t mean that all 13-year-olds should have smartphones. It depends.

I suggest getting a “dumb phone” rather than a smart phone. A dumb phone can make and receive phone calls; that’s all.

Who is responsible when kids send pictures on their cell phone? My answer: PARENTS are responsible. See my op-ed October 25 2013 for the *Wall Street Journal*,

<http://on.wsj.com/1dp0OXO>. See also my discussion of this topic on Fox News, October 29 2013, <http://video.foxnews.com/v/2781648798001>.

The most important thing parents must teach kids about online communication: **there is no privacy**. That's the lesson of General David Petraeus and Paula Broadwell. For an update, please see Jessica Bennett's article "Paula Broadwell, David Petraeus and the afterlife of a scandal," *New York Times*, May 28 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/fashion/david-petraeus-paula-broadwell-scandal-affair.html>.

Your job is to be a parent, not a best friend. A best friend can't tell you what to eat, or forbid you to watch violent pornography, or take away your phone at 9 pm; but a parent can, and must.

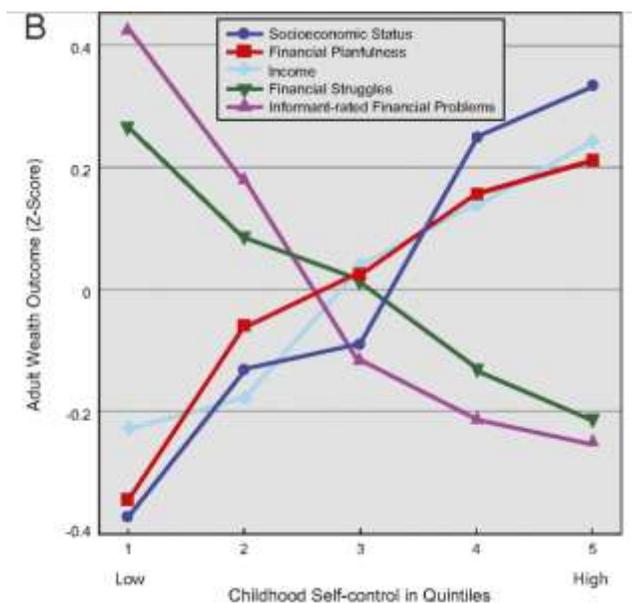
My references to the work of Dr. Gordon Neufeld are from his book *Hold On To Your Kids: Why parents need to matter more than peers* (Gabor Maté, co-author), Toronto: Vintage Canada, second edition, 2013 – and also to our face-to-face meeting in Vancouver in 2014.

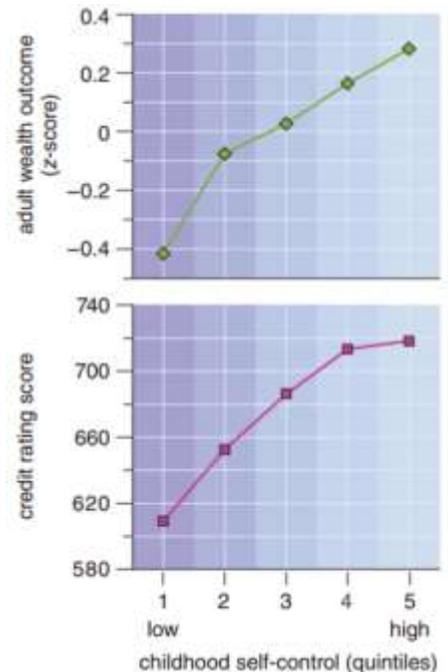
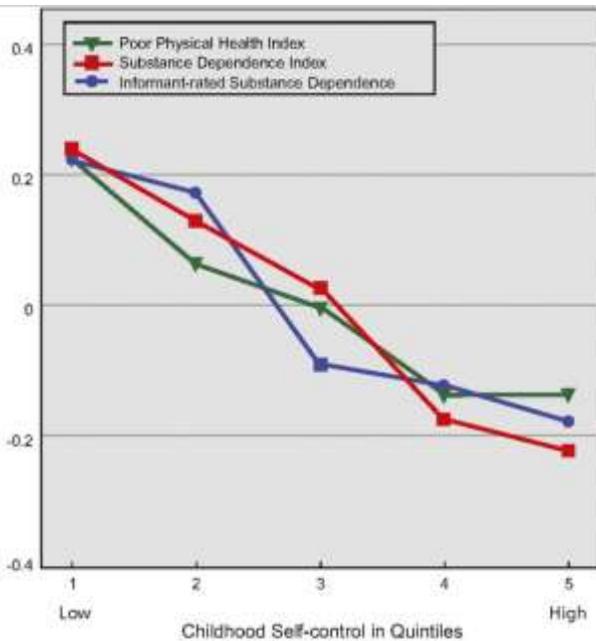
Longitudinal cohort studies demonstrating the importance of Conscientiousness:

Roberts et al. 2007 = Brent W. Roberts and colleagues, "The Power of Personality: The Comparative Validity of Personality Traits, Socioeconomic Status, and Cognitive Ability for Predicting Important Life Outcomes," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2:313-345, 2007, full text at <http://classdat.appstate.edu/COB/MGT/VillanPD/OB%20Fall%202012/Unit%202/Personality%20Articles/The%20Power%20of%20Personality%202007.pdf>.

See Terrie E. Moffitt and colleagues, "A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108: 2693 – 2698, 2011, full text online at <http://www.pnas.org/content/108/7/2693.full.pdf+html>.

These two graphs come from Moffitt et al. 2011:





Dr. James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, University of Chicago: character skills matter more. See Dr. Heckman's essay, "Lacking character, American education fails the test," full text at http://www.heckmanequation.org/sites/default/files/F_Non-cognitive%20skills_V3.pdf.

Teaching self-control and virtue should be among your top priorities for your daughter or son. Character matters as much or more than academic achievement

Conscientiousness is the only trait which achieves the hat trick: more health, more wealth, and more happiness. See Angela Duckworth and colleagues, "Who does well in life? Conscientious adults excel in both objective and subjective success," *Frontiers in Psychology*, volume 3, article 356, September 2012, online at <http://journal.frontiersin.org/Journal/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00356/full>.

For a survey of interventions to boost self-control in young children, see the review by Alex Piquero and colleagues, "Self-control interventions for children under age 10 for improving self-control and delinquency and problem behaviors," *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 2010, #2 (117 pages). Piquero and colleagues accept Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi's assertion that interventions to boost self-control are not effective for children over 10 to 12 years of age. I don't accept that assertion. Gottfredson and Hirschi are basing their assessment on their experience (pre-1990) with teenage juvenile delinquents. I concede that there is evidence that the criminal justice system is not

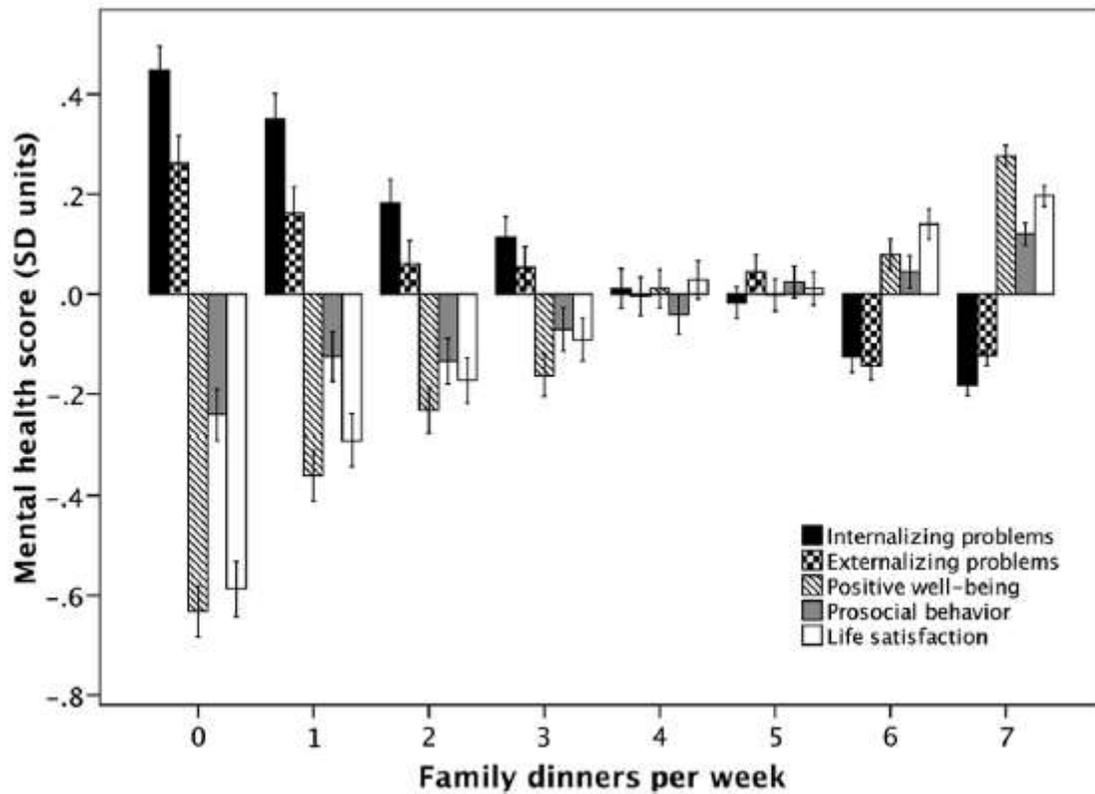
effective in boosting self-control in incarcerated teenagers: see for example Ojmarrh Mitchell and Doris Mackenzie, “The stability and resiliency of self-control in a sample of incarcerated offenders,” *Crime and Delinquency*, volume 52, pp. 432 – 449, 2006. But data based on incarcerated juvenile offenders may not be valid for parents of children who are living in the community. More to the point: I have personally seen numerous cases in my own practice where kids of every age, under age 10 and over age 10, have reformed and become more Conscientious because parents implemented some of the strategies we have discussed. Even very simple interventions, such as repeatedly telling a child to Stop and Think! before you act, can have profound and lasting beneficial consequences, even in kids who have been diagnosed with ADHD: see for example Molly Reid and John Borkowski, “Causal attributions of hyperactive children: implications for teaching strategies and self-control,” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, volume 79, pp. 296 – 307, 1987.

The more general premises here are that *personality can change at any age* and that *increased Conscientiousness is beneficial*. For evidence supporting these premises, see the study by Christopher Boyce and colleagues, “Is personality fixed? Personality changes as much as ‘variable’ economic factors and more strongly predicts changes to life satisfaction,” *Social Indicators Research*, volume 111, pp. 287 – 305, 2013; and also Christopher Magee and colleagues, “Personality trait change and life satisfaction in adults: the roles of age and hedonic balance,” *Personality and Individual Differences*, volume 55, pp. 694 – 698, 2013. The older you are, the less likely your personality is to change. I am not asserting that it is easy for a 65-year-old to become more Conscientious. But I have seen 5-year-olds and 15-year-olds who have become more Conscientious.

There is a false dichotomy between the “Tiger Mom” and the “Irish Setter Dad.” The Tiger Mom is all about achievement. The Irish Setter Dad just wants kids to have a good time. Both are mistaken.

The search for meaning. Without meaning, life has no point. The result is anxiety, depression, and disengagement. Your job as a parent is to educate desire: to instill a longing for things higher and deeper. In the arts, in music, and in your child’s character.

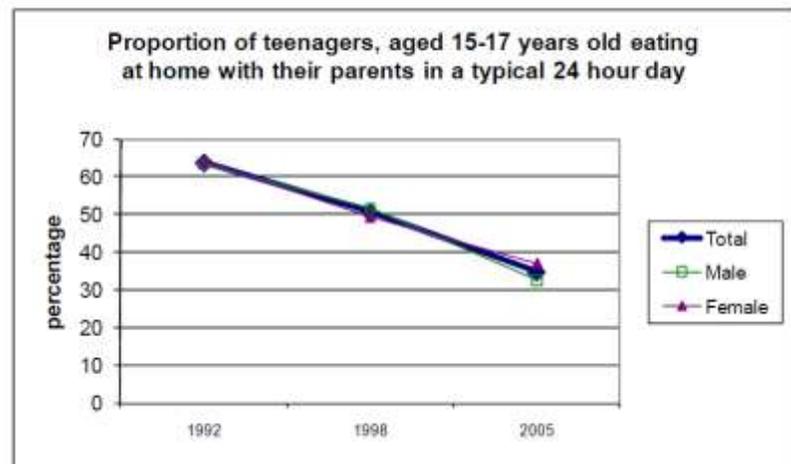
Having a meal with a parent greatly decreases the risk of problems, and improves satisfaction, in a “dose-dependent” fashion from days 1 through 7 (there are 7 days in a week). See Frank Elgar, 2013, *Journal of Adolescent Health*. This graph is Figure 1 from their paper.



No devices allowed at the dinner table. Limit social media.

Choose vacations with no Internet access (Google search for “**unplugged** vacations”), or at the very least, outdoor vacations.

Prioritize family. If you have a connection to another culture, nurture and strengthen that connection.



“Ban the bedroom.” No screens in the bedroom.

Why are so many girls and boys today more likely to be anxious, depressed, and/or fragile? My answers:

- ⦿ Parents have allowed relations with same-age peers to displace the family
- ⦿ **You can change that**
- ⦿ Parents have allowed social media and video games to displace real world experience
- ⦿ **You can change that**
- ⦿ Parents have failed to teach virtue and character, with authority
- ⦿ **You can change that**

Here are some comments about my books:

Why Gender Matters “. . . is a lucid guide to male and female brain differences.”

New York Times

Boys Adrift “. . . is powerfully and persuasively presented. . . Excellent and informative references and information are provided.”

Journal of the American Medical Association

Boys Adrift: “A must-read for any parent of boys. This is real science, and Dr. Sax thoroughly uncovers the important health issues that parents of boys need to be tuned into.”

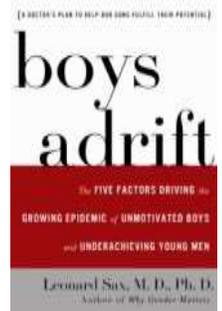
Dr. Mehmet Oz, host of “The Dr. Oz Show”

Girls on the Edge: “Packed with advice and concrete suggestions for parents, *Girls on the Edge* is a treasure trove of rarely-seen research on girls, offering families guidance on some of the most pressing issues facing girls today. Dr Sax’s commitment to girls’ success comes through on every page.”

*Rachel Simmons, author of *Odd Girl Out**

Girls on the Edge: “This is essential reading for parents and teachers, and one of the most thought-provoking books on teen development available.”

Library Journal



Girls on the Edge: *“The best book about the current state of girls and young women in America . . . offers astonishing and troubling new insight . . .”*

The Atlantic

The Collapse of Parenting: *“One of the premier experts on parenting, Dr. Leonard Sax brilliantly articulates the problems parents experience with their children, then gives solutions. **The Collapse of Parenting** is academic but practical, simple but deep. If you have time to read only one book this year, **read this one.**”*

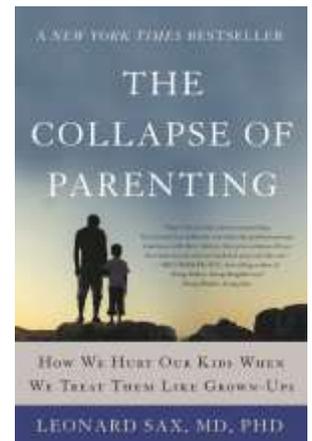
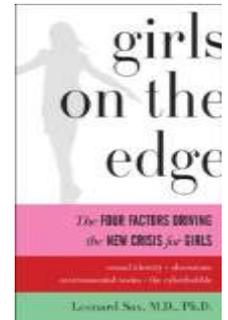
Meg Meeker MD, author of **Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters** and **Strong Mothers, Strong Sons**

The Collapse of Parenting: *“With years of experience and research working directly with parents and children, Dr. Leonard Sax provides an important glimpse into parenting in modern times, where it’s gone wrong, and how to fix it. Being a parent has never been more important and Dr. Sax explains how to avoid parenting pitfalls and raise your children well.”*

Bill Bennett PhD, former US Secretary of Education

The Collapse of Parenting: *“A comprehensive breakdown of where parents have gone awry and how they can get back on track to teach virtue and character to their children. . . .Sax provides a series of easy-to-follow solutions that help bring parents and children back to the same page, working toward a healthier, more respectful, and conscientious attitude. . . .With the author’s solid advice, parents have a good shot at achieving these goals.”*

Kirkus Reviews



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- ¹ Edward Swing and colleagues, “Television and video game exposure and the development of attention problems,” *Pediatrics*, volume 126, pp. 214 – 221, 2010. See also Douglas Gentile and colleagues, “Video game playing, attention problems, and impulsiveness: evidence of bidirectional causality,” *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, volume 1, pp. 62 – 70, 2012.
- ² Jay Hull, Ana Draghici, and James Sargent, “A longitudinal study of risk-glorifying video games and reckless driving,” *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, volume 1, pp. 244 – 253, 2012.
- ³ Kathleen Beullens and Jan Van den Bulck, “Predicting young drivers’ car crashes: music video viewing and the playing of driving games. Results from a prospective cohort study,” *Media Psychology*, volume 16, issue 1, 2013.
- ⁴ Stervo Mario and colleagues, “Frequent video-game playing in young males is associated with central adiposity and high-sugar, low-fibre dietary consumption,” *Eating and Weight Disorders*, volume 19, pp. 515-520, 2014. See also Catherine Berkey and colleagues, “Activity, dietary intake, and weight changes in a longitudinal study of preadolescent and adolescent boys and girls,” *Pediatrics*, volume 105, 2000, pp. e56; and Elizabeth Vandewater and colleagues, “Linking obesity and activity level with children’s television and video game use,” *Journal of Adolescence*, volume 27, pp. 71 – 85, 2004.
- ⁵ Jean-Philippe Chaput and colleagues, “Video game playing increases food intake in adolescents: a randomized crossover study,” *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, volume 93, pp. 1196 – 1203, 2011.
- ⁶ Megan Mathers and colleagues, “Electronic media use and adolescent health and well-being: cross-sectional community study,” *Academic Pediatrics*, volume 9, pp. 307 – 314, 2009.