Thoughtful, Practical Advice

Madeline Levine has been a practicing psychologist for twenty-five years, but it was only recently that she began to observe a new breed of unhappy teenager. When a bright, personable fifteen-year-old girl, from a loving and financially comfortable family, came into her office with the word empty carved into her left forearm, Levine was startled. This girl and her message seemed to embody a disturbing pattern Levine had been observing. Her teenage patients were bright, socially skilled, and loved by their affluent parents. But behind a veneer of achievement and charm, many of these teens suffered severe emotional problems. What was going on?

Conversations with educators and clinicians across the country as well as meticulous research confirmed Levines suspicions that something was terribly amiss. Numerous studies show that privileged adolescents are experiencing epidemic rates of depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse -- rates that are higher than those of any other socioeconomic group of young people in this country. The various elements of a perfect storm -- materialism, pressure to achieve, perfectionism, disconnection -- are combining to create a crisis in Americas culture of affluence. This culture is as unmanageable for parents -- mothers in particular -- as it is for their children. While many privileged kids project confidence and know how to make a good impression, alarming numbers lack the basic foundation of psychological development: an authentic sense of self. Even parents often miss the signs of significant emotional problems in their star children.

In this controversial look at privileged families, Levine offers thoughtful, practical advice as she explodes one child-rearing myth after another. With empathy and candor, she identifies parenting practices that are toxic to healthy self-development and that have contributed to epidemic levels of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse in the most unlikely place -- the affluent family.

Raising children in a competitive, wealthy suburb is difficult especially when you the parent grew up in the total opposite environment. This book helped me realize that I am doing nothing wrong in raising my children with the values I learned growing up. Watching these wealthy parents give their children material items way before they should have them (cell phones, ipods, computers, etc) made me feel like I was the wrong for waiting until my children were an age that I considered appropriate for these objects. Now I don't feel guilty saying "no" to these expensive and age inappropriate items. I watch these parents overscheduling their children and hovering over every move they make in everything they do and thought I wasn't doing enough for my children because I wanted them to have "down time". Now I feel good when my kids sleep later on a weekend because they are not signed up for seven activities. I realize that they are developing their own sense of self when they sit in their room and have some alone time. I highly recommend this book, especially if you are feeling like I was. Dr. Levine is totally on target and provides good advice on raising children effectively when they are surrounded in this type of environment.

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