

Book Review: How Toddlers Thrive

Tovah Klein, director of the Barnard Center for Toddler Development, is a licensed child psychologist and author of *How Toddlers Thrive: What Parents Can Do Today for Children 2-5 to Plant the Seeds of Lifelong Success*. Klein vividly illustrates common parenting dilemmas and shares candid advice about how to have a positive impact on our children's lives.¹ I expect this might make a terrific manual for both preschool teachers and parents through its informed guidance about age appropriate developmental concerns.

Clinical experience suggests raising children requires almost magical powers. It seems that even the most carefully considered concepts about parenting fail to fully inoculate parents against the confusion and disorder children can, and do, generate. See-saw like shifts between precarious autonomy and exacting dependency can leave a parent feeling undoubtedly frustrated, worried, and helpless. According to Klein, this is when parenting matters most in the fostering of self regulation, the capacity to handle intense thoughts and emotions, the ability to remain on task, rebound from failure, problem solve, establish relationships, follow authority, and manage every day stressors. Self regulation is apparent when one is able to self soothe, conceptualize and communicate needs, remain relatively engaged with others, and adapt to predictable and unexpected transitions without becoming unduly disorganized.

Understandably, parenting promises a special relationship: one tightly packed with unspoken wishes, fears, and fantasies about nurturing and controlling another so dependent on us to care for them. Klein encourages parents to look inwardly in an effort to achieve a better appreciation for why particular traits, behaviors, and needs in ones own children are especially unsettling.

Klein explains the brain and mind of a toddler (children, adolescents, young adults) is shaped and molded by interactive (relational) and dynamic (experiential) experiences within context of variable factors (biology and inherited tendencies/temperament). According to the author, staying involved and cued into the developmental needs of children, rather than asserting control, is essential in fostering future success.

Klein generously elucidates the inner workings of a toddlers mind in a way that encourages awe and respect for the individual process. Promoting the importance of appreciating a child-centered point of view as effective parenting, the author encourages parents to remember that children are innately dependent—especially when they are most out of control. Seemingly contradictory behaviors, which trigger parental feelings of angst, are viewed as opportunities to discover what children are thinking, feeling, and struggling to achieve developmentally. Klein asserts the primary task in parenting is to assist children in handling negative feelings (disappointments, rejections, and setbacks) rather than to *make* them happy, as is a common misperception. This task is achieved by validating negative reactions to experiences, instead of censoring, challenging, or cajoling.

¹ Klein, Tovah P. (2014). *How Toddlers Thrive: What Parents Can Do Today for Children Ages 2-5 to Plant the Seeds of Lifelong Success*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

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Noting that how one was raised impacts their unique parenting perspective, the author proposes a parental questionnaire in order to foster an appreciation for the stumbling blocks one inevitably encounters on their journey towards establishing an empathically supportive stance.² In my opinion this is a wonderful tool for facilitating parental cooperation while considering better ways to address complicated family dynamics, specifically power struggles.

² Home and Family: Think about growing up in your family: 1. What was your general family feeling? Warm, caring, and loving? Parents who accepted you for who you were, the good, and the bad? Were your parents more distant and cold, even if loving? A family riddled with conflicts, tension, or breakups? (page. 65)