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THE PARENTS WE MEAN TO BE

by Richard Weissbourd (*Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*; \$25)

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In this ardent and persuasive inquiry, Weissbourd, a Harvard psychologist, warns that “happiness-besotted” parents do children a disservice by emphasizing personal fulfillment over empathy. (A high-school English teacher laments the difficulty of teaching “King Lear” to students who “can’t engage suffering in any way.”) Parents worry about their children’s confidence, but constant, preemptive praise can turn kids into cynics; studies show that playground bullies (and, later in life, criminals) exhibit high self-esteem. Drawing on extensive field research, Weissbourd makes the case that parents, as models of behavior, must be vigilant about their own moral choices. If we’re afraid to risk our kids’ ire by criticizing them, how can we expect them to resist peer pressure? Of special concern are parents who try too hard to be their kids’ friends. Weissbourd explains, “Children have no incentive to become like us, because the message we’re giving is that they already are.” ♦

KEYWORDS

“The Parents We Mean to Be” (*Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*; \$25); Richard Weissbourd; Parenting; Children; Child Development