



Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times

Margaret K. Nelson

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They go by many names: helicopter parents, hovercrafts, PFHs (Parents from Hell). The news media is filled with stories of well-intentioned parents going to ridiculous extremes to remove all obstacles from their child's path to greatness . . . or at least to an ivy league school. From cradle to college, they remain intimately enmeshed in their children's lives, stifling their development and creating infantilized, spoiled, immature adults unprepared to make the decisions necessary for the real world. Or so the story goes.

Drawing on a wealth of eye-opening interviews with parents across the country, Margaret K. Nelson cuts through the stereotypes and hyperbole to examine the realities of what she terms "parenting out of control." Situating this phenomenon within a broad sociological context, she finds several striking explanations for why today's prosperous and well-educated parents are unable to set realistic boundaries when it comes to raising their children. Analyzing the goals and aspirations parents have for their children as well as the strategies they use to reach them, Nelson discovers fundamental differences among American parenting styles that expose class fault lines, both within the elite and between the elite and the middle and working classes.

Nelson goes on to explore the new ways technology shapes modern parenting. From baby monitors to cell phones (often referred to as the world's longest umbilical cord), to social networking sites, and even GPS devices, parents have more tools at their disposal than ever before to communicate with, supervise, and even spy on their children. These play important and often surprising roles in the phenomenon of parenting out of control. Yet the technologies parents choose, and those they refuse to use, often seem counterintuitive. Nelson shows that these choices make sense when viewed in the light of class expectations.

Today's parents are faced with unprecedented opportunities and dangers for their children, and are evolving novel strategies to adapt to these changes. Nelson's lucid and insightful work provides an authoritative examination of what happens when these new strategies go too far.

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