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Bringing Up Bebe: One American Mother Discovers The Wisdom Of French Parenting



Synopsis

The secret behind France's astonishingly well-behaved children is here. When American journalist Pamela Druckerman has a baby in Paris, she doesn't aspire to become a "French parent". French parenting isn't a known thing, like French fashion or French cheese. Even French parents themselves insist they aren't doing anything special. Yet the French children Druckerman knows sleep through the night at two or three months old while those of her American friends take a year or more. French kids eat well-rounded meals that are more likely to include braised leeks than chicken nuggets. And while her American friends spend their visits resolving spats between their kids, her French friends sip coffee while the kids play. Motherhood itself is a whole different experience in France. There's no role model, as there is in America, for the harried new mom with no life of her own. French mothers assume that even good parents aren't at the constant service of their children and that there's no need to feel guilty about this. They have an easy, calm authority with their kids that Druckerman can only envy. Of course, French parenting wouldn't be worth talking about if it produced robotic, joyless children. In fact, French kids are just as boisterous, curious, and creative as Americans. They're just far better behaved and more in command of themselves. While some American toddlers are getting Mandarin tutors and preliteracy training, French kids are - by design - toddling around and discovering the world at their own pace. With a notebook stashed in her diaper bag, Druckerman, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal, sets out to learn the secrets to raising a society of good little sleepers, gourmet eaters, and reasonably relaxed parents. She discovers that French parents are extremely strict about some things and strikingly permissive about others. And she realizes that to be a different kind of parent, you don't just need a different parenting philosophy. You need a very different view of what a child actually is. While finding her own firm non, Druckerman discovers that children - including her own - are capable of feats she'd never imagined.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As is the case with many books comparing American parenting styles with that of other countries, some potential readers have felt opinionated - even defensive - before even buying the book. While I certainly haven't concluded that French parenting is "right" and American parenting is "wrong", this intriguing book deserves a fair chance - one obtained by reading it - but some initial "reviews" were written by people who simply refused to read a book comparing American and French parenting techniques. So what will you find in *Bringing Up Bebe*? What makes this one worth a look? To start with, the author, Pamela Druckerman, does not come off as someone who is crazy about France, let alone French parenting - at first. As she writes early on, "I'm not even sure I like living here" although she does change her tune later. She came to her opinions about French parenting slowly and she backs up her main points with plenty of research studies as well as techniques she learned from French parents and parenting authorities. As a result she concludes that "the French have managed to be involved without becoming obsessive. " They aren't waiting on their kids hand and foot and they don't assume that they have to push their children to succeed. Even so, she notes that she hadn't thought she was supposed to admire French parenting. So consider her a reluctant convert to French methods of parenting. Druckerman observes that there doesn't appear to be a relentless drive to get babies and children to various lessons or such activities as early swimming lessons. A neighbor was content to let her children simply find ways to play, often with old toys or perhaps by exploring her outdoor environment.

I have to admit that I did not immediately want to read this book, since the article version I read online seemed very different from my own views about parenting. But my father bought it and lent it to me, and it turned out to be a very entertaining and easy read. Druckerman does a fabulous job building a narrative out of her experience and weaving together personal anecdotes with strong research. As a work of non-fiction, it is highly enjoyable to read and thought provoking. However, there is no question this book will also be read as a "parenting book" rather than just a "book about parenting." And, it does, at points, venture into "parenting book" territory, even though Druckerman never uses the imperative tense or claims ultimate authority. But, she does consistently present

"French parenting" in a very positive light, and in every contrast to American examples, French examples come out ahead. I have very little experience with this culture myself, so I certainly can't judge how consistent this parenting style actually is, so I have to take her word for that. It wouldn't surprise me that a centralized European nation would have a more consistent parenting style than the mish mash of approaches here in the states. Given that "French parenting" is always presented within a very reasonable seeming paradigm of success, there is definitely a feeling of "this is a very good way to do things" throughout. And, certainly, the ideas that overlap with successful parenting in the U.S. (often called "authoritative" parenting in the states) seem good.

This is not a how-to book, and yet, after reading it, I feel suddenly equipped to face all the many daily challenges my 20-month-old daughter throws at me. The thing this book made me realize was that I am already equipped with the necessary tools. I was just too afraid/confused/exhausted/frustrated/hopeless to use them. What caught my attention about this book was Druckerman's assertion that Americans tend to blame a child's good or bad behavior on temperament, whereas the French assume patience can be taught to anyone. I often say, "My child has been this way since she was two weeks old." She's always been a very alert, active, charming, rebellious, impatient child. I believed it was my fate to never be able to take her in a store without enduring a temper tantrum. I was mostly hopeless that I would ever be able to control the force of nature that is my child. Then I found Druckerman's book. I stayed up until 3 a.m. reading it because the middle of the night is the only time my child lets me get anything done. Aside from the parenting stuff, it was a fun read, an expatriate memoir (which I always enjoy) with a sense of humor and a gossipy inside look at the lives of other parents of toddlers from the U.S. and France. But what makes me rate this book five stars is the parenting information. The French (or the segment of the French population Druckerman is describing) all share one philosophy on parenting, which boils down to teaching patience, not hovering, not feeling guilt over every little thing, and having confidence. Something about the idea of ONE philosophy made me feel so relieved. I've read about every kind of parenting philosophy there is, to the point that I almost never had confidence I was doing the right thing.

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