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“The Danish Way of Parenting: What the Happiest People in the World know about Raising Confident, Capable Kids,” by Jessica Joelle Alexander and Iben Dissing Sandahl, provides a glimpse into the parenting of Danish people and why they are the happiest people in the world and by proxy, successful parents. When considering how a person may guide their children, many may lean back on their past experiences or even mimic the behaviour of other parents or guardians who they think are raising the best children. But it may not always be the best option, hence why Alexander and Sandahl suggest the Danish method. They simplify the Danish way into six essential concepts: Play, Authenticity, Reframing, Empathy, No Ultimatums, and Togetherness (PARENT), each idea being of equal value. The cultural analysis explores the intricate facets of how Danes tackle parenting and social relations using various studies, observations, and first-hand accounts while providing tips on utilising each technique. Parenthood is not a perfect cut-and-dry process. It is a skill that requires patience and effort with much trial and error.

According to Alexander and Sandahl’s findings, in a Western mindset, to some, the definition of successful parenting comes from how many toys your child has, how many food options they have, how many extracurricular activities they do, and how high their grades are—all
of which can help, but are fundamentally superficial things as it detracts from a child’s sense of self (pp. 15-17). Some parents may say that it is for the betterment of their children. But what someone should have may not always be what they need. Alternatively, Danes prefer to focus on the well-being of their children, i.e., how they conceptualise their world and deal with stressors that carry on into their adult lives. In the author’s findings, Danes emphasize the need for children to discover and grow independently as a critical element to their development. Allowing children to comprehend the world in their own time will enable them to face adult adversities calmly, as they have the necessary coping skills from pre-adolescence. How they do it mainly involves children playing freely alone or with others, with little to no intervention from adults. The overall purpose of such a method is to simulate situations and develop skills to deal with them. Their idea holds with studies that show evidence of a positive correlation between the effectiveness of free play and the ability to cope (pp. 20-21). They emphasise that free play facilitates scenarios that mimic future obstacles. Playing ultimately allows children to feel more secure in themselves and their abilities.

The authors also express that Danish parenting is not about controlling children or being right but about compromise, which builds a healthy parent-child relationship. When caring for any child, many issues arise when trying to educate and employ good habits. The authors stress the importance of being patient and that, with time, children will realise the importance of things they learn. Alexander’s experience, referred to as “Jessica,” supports the need to be patient with a child, where her daughter discovers the importance of wearing a jacket and socks to keep warm after previously not wanting to (p. 112). It is important to note that Alexander did not threaten or guilt
her daughter into wearing the articles of clothing but instead let her realise their value. Using means of coercion often results in the opposite of what the parent wants, especially with the use of physical discipline, where children become psychologically damaged as a consequence (p. 103-104). As an alternative means, the authors suggest that parents provide a safety blanket for children to make mistakes and learn from them safely. Hence, compromise and patience build stronger connections between parents and their children.

How can Danes incorporate seemingly simple methods into their daily lives as opposed to other countries? As the authors report, it comes down to the Danish upbringing. Danes value social relationships. As stated by the authors, Danes have a cultural practice called hygge (hoo-ga), which is the backbone of the Danish lifestyle's social support and relationship strength. They put aside individual desires and issues to maintain their strong bonds and emphasize other people’s needs (pp. 127-128). Even though it is a different word, all cultures and societies demonstrate hygge. However, as shown in American society, those ideals and their worth are weighed differently across cultures, instead favouring the individual (p. 126). A self-centred mindset often prevents people from seeing others, creating boundaries to become a singularity. Does that mean that it is impossible to achieve in a different society? The authors suggest otherwise. Another quality Danes learn at a young age is to be emotionally honest and empathetic. They tend not to let negative feelings weigh them down but serve as necessary aspects of life to enjoy the positive ones better. One way that they teach these traits is through the types of entertainment, like movies, people consume, which are not always inherently end happily (pp. 31-33). Doing so makes people reflect on and translate the experience to their personal life. Later on, the impression left by these types
of events allows children to have the emotional maturity to handle difficult situations with clearer minds (with some help from parents, of course). Thus, the authors advise that to have good relations with children, they must first understand their feelings to interact with others with respect and dignity.

Above all, good parenting is about identifying what an adult can do that is better for their children. Taking a step back and assessing situations is crucial so parents can achieve the best outcome for everyone. Like how each child is unique, how an adult should tend to them and educate them should also be distinct in a way that benefits the child best. The goal is to achieve happier children who will become happy adults and raise happy children, generation after generation. Alexander and Sandahl point out the hills and valleys associated with parenting and make suggestions to better the experience of both adults and children alike. Sometimes, a parent may fall short of their duties and lose sight of their child's needs, damaging the family relationship. But it does not matter how many they make as long as they learn from their mistakes. Just like Alexander approached her son differently when she realised the distress she was causing him when trying to enforce safety (pp. 6-7). Parenting is not perfect; it is improved and worked upon, which makes a good parent.

As the book suggests, soon-to-be parents or guardians or those already caring for children, like educators and health field workers, will benefit from the analysis. Additionally, psychologists, social workers and sociologists looking into parenting would aid in studying the research. I recommend it to those individuals, but I would not restrict it to those people but everyone. Anyone can learn something from it. One can interpret the acronym PARENT as a guide to approaching
new or pre-existing relationships with family and friends to improve connections or stability. One concern, however, is that a person may think they are already doing the best regarding childrearing when, in reality, they are not, rendering the analysis useless. It is only effective if the reader is open to the idea that they can improve or want to do better. Regardless of the previous statement, I enjoyed reading “The Danish Way of Parenting.” It is fascinating, heartwarming, and a reminder of parents’ impact on their children; they reflect on yourself.