



**Alexander, Jessica, Joelle and Iben Dissing Sandhal. (2016). The Danish Way of Parenting: What the Happiest People in the World know about Raising Confident, Capable Kids. New York: Tarcher Perigree.**

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Jessica Alexander and Iben Sandhal's book, "The Danish Way of Parenting: What the Happiest People in the World know about Raising Confident, Capable Kids", is a step-by-step parenting guide on how to raise your kids in the Danish sense of the way. This guide carefully lays out tips for parents, new and old, to look into what the "happiest people on earth" do in order to raise their children. This book supposes that the Danish people forgo normal parenting rules and styles which in turn make their children much more confident and happier than kids from America for example. This book investigates how social settings and personal relationships dictate how a child can turn out. Some very important concepts that are repeated throughout the book are the use of language, the need for empathy, and the concept of "hygge". These styles of parenting are key ones that are repeatedly touched upon in many of the chapters.

Before getting into the use of language, it is worth mentioning that the chapters in this book are divided by letters; letters spelling out the word "parent", with each letter pertaining to a parenting technique. This method caught my interest since it is an easy way of catching the attention of sleep deprived, overly exerted parents, or, expecting parents who are nervous to be put

headfirst into the world of raising a child. It is an easy mode of delivery that stands out while also successfully delivering the point.

The use of language when raising a child is very important, Alexander and Sandhal emphasize this point throughout the book. They point out that words indeed have power, and the way in which they are used, especially towards children, have lasting impacts. When talking about famous Danish philosopher Knud Ejler Logstrup, Alexander and Sandhal say, “the words we use, or the stories we tell about others, are essential for teaching our children how to be able to put themselves in some else’s shoes” (p. 133). It is important and essential for children to understand how to empathize and relate to others so that in social buildings/settings such as schools, daycares, or playgrounds, children are more equipped in handling situations. With this, just as the title of the book says, these kids will become capable and confident in their own right. Reframing words, which is a specific chapter in the book, also deals with the way in which specific language is important when raising a child. Limiting language can be non-beneficial when it comes to assessing what the root of a problem really is. Simply saying “a is b” does not take into account the fluidity of emotion: “Labels, as we have seen, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy” (p. 101). If you insist that a child is feeling something, it is likely that the child will end up feeling this way, which may have never been so in the first place. In the Danish way, simply reframing words to get to the problem works out much better. For example, if a child is angry or upset, asking the child why they feel this way is better than insisting that they should or should not feel angry. The use of supportive language in this way of parenting is emphasized and rightly so, for it allows the chance of growth and personal learning when the use of other words can be stagnant.

Kindness and empathy should be a given when raising a child, but the importance that the Danish put upon this principle is worth taking note. Alexander and Sandhal suggests that vulnerability is rarely shown even when a person feels this emotion, because they are afraid of a social disconnect. The thought of being a social pariah is enough for people to not feel empathy and vulnerability in the way they really want to: “We so much want social connection that we become afraid to say something that might make another person reject us” (p. 120), In Denmark, the learning of empathy starts as early as preschool, with a national programs such as “Step by Step” and “CAT-kit” being taught early on. The learning of empathy goes hand in hand with the consequences that can arise. An important part of learning empathy is the weight of responsibility. When it comes to a situation, it is essential not to force a child to do one thing or another, but to allow them to make the decision for themselves. Keeping empathy in mind, whatever decision the child makes, they should also accept the consequences that may follow. Teaching empathy as early as possible is beneficial for both the parent and the child in the future. As the child enters social settings such as school, peer pressure becomes an increasingly harmful aspect: “Teenagers who are exposed to the wrong kind of peer pressure will have an easier time standing up for what they feel is right if they have been shown that their feelings are valid from early on” (p. 137). The Danish way of teaching empathy makes it clear that while other people’s feelings are valid, so are yours, which ties into the title of raising a confident child. Alexander and Sandhal demonstrate that vulnerability and weakness don’t go hand in hand. Being able to properly express these emotions is what makes a confident and capable child.

“Hygge” is another important aspect in the book, with the central theme being found in

many of the chapters. It is derived from the Germanic word “hyggja” and means “to think or feel satisfied” (p. 176). This concept is a popular one amongst Danish families and communities because it emphasizes comfort and togetherness. It enhances family structures since it relies on the combination of effort from everyone in a family, to achieve a sense of peace and comfort during certain moments, such as Christmas dinner. While in the other chapters, the importance put upon developing a sense of agency in children is revered, hygge states that the connection between individuals is what gives meaning in our lives: “The individual is prized too, but without the interaction and support of others, none of us can be truly happy as a whole person” (p. 177). The book also asks parents to entertain the idea of taking a “hygge oath” to ensure that all members in the family know the time to make an effort and connect.

Alexander and Sandhal make an extended effort in teaching how the Danish raise their children. With both authors having families of their own, they saw this book as an opportunity to teach other families a new way to raising their children, different than the American way at least. One limitation I thought about when reading this book is that there were no negatives, it painted the Danish way as the only way, the correct way compared to any other way of parenting. Just like in a regular scholarly argumentative essay, it is always beneficial to see the other side of an argument rather than just seeing the best of it. Sociology studies surrounding the topic of family, new parents, aspiring parents, and child psychology students are groups that I can see would benefit from reading this book. I enjoyed the perspective this book gave me when it comes to raising a child. It allowed me to think of alternative ways of parenting (not that it will be useful anytime soon) and it expanded my knowledge on what to do and what not to do when raising a child.