



**Alexander, Jessica and Sandahl, Iben. (2016). The Danish Way of Parenting: What the Happiest People in the World Know About Raising Confident, Capable Kids. New York: Tarcher Perigee.**

Reviewed by: Sydney Smith, MacEwan University

Jessica Alexander and Iben Sandahl's book, "The Danish Way of Parenting," clearly describes the essential components of childhood and parental development. The book is constructed to educate the audience about how the Danish people went about their parenting strategies and what attributes they feel are essential to instill into their children. Attributes are the composition of people's identity; things like self-growth, resilience, authenticity, reframing, and empathy were all components that Alexander and Sandahl included as necessary to achieve this ideal and well-rounded child. Different characteristics can be developed and influenced through what parents felt was beneficial for their children to learn as it would assist in developing them into a strong and self-reliant individual. Parents have the ultimate responsibility of helping with the development of their children as in what they emphasize as crucial aspects for character and how they chose to teach and further expand their children's understanding of these aspects.

Alexander and Sandahl expressed the importance of self-growth as they view it as a necessary thing that is needed to be done throughout a lifetime to expand personal abilities. As stated in the book, "in Denmark, parents try not to intervene unless it's absolutely necessary" (p.

17); this alludes to the idea that Danish parents support the idea of allowing their children to independently grow into their own unique personalities. Without the intervention of parental opinions, the children were able fully understand and interpret their own emotions therefore allowing them to fully comprehend the concept of self. The authors emphasized an individualistic self-concept, which was explained through the Danish belief of it being vital to assist in the building of their children's internal locus of control as it can be linked to self-confidence. Hence, they will feel they have complete control over their lives and decisions, which helps them gain their own voice and thoughts (p. 17). "The central for Danish parenting philosophy is a concept called "proximal development," first introduced by Lev Vygotsky" (p. 16); this quote supports the idea that Alexander and Sandahl portrayed that the child should develop on their terms as the concept of proximal development is giving the child his/her own space to grow. Self-growth was seen as important for the overall maturation of a child and was a major attribution to character development.

Resilience is another characteristic that Alexander and Sandahl felt was a crucial aspect in developing well-rounded individuals. A study showed a positive correlation between the amount children play and their ability to evaluate and handle social situations, giving them better coping mechanisms for future circumstances (pp. 20-21). Alexander and Sandahl intentionally incorporated the playfulness's significant effect on children as a way to illustrate how coping with stressful and fearful situations will indirectly instill resilience. The Danes understood the benefits of not overpraising as it pushes the child to grow and learn, resulting in a more resilient and confident child (p. 36). Situations being a learning curve and not so much of a praising opportunity

is what the Danes try and follow as they believe this will cause the child to be fulfilled and secure with themselves and not yearn for the approval of others; "this value of humility is about knowing who you are so well that you don't need others to make you feel important" (p. 36). Alexander and Sandahl highlighted the importance of distinguishing between a growth and a fixed mindset. A growth mindset allows for a more confident and resilient mindset, which explains why these people are hard-working and show dedication while being diligent will give them tremendous success. On the other hand, people with a fixed mindset are not as ambitious to strive for better so they are unlikely to develop further and gain characteristics such as resilience. Being resilient was seen as a favourable attribute for children to gain as it allows them to adapt successfully to all types of situations which Alexander and Sandahl highlighted in the book.

Being authentic is a principal characteristic that Danish people strive to obtain. Alexander and Sandahl explained this principle characteristic in the book through the example of "Danish films would touch on sensitive, real, and painful issues that didn't wrap it up with a nice bow" (p. 32). The authors also included research conducted by communications professor Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick and her Colleagues, which explained how the Danes intentionally produced heart-wrenching and sensitive movies to make people think about how lucky they truly are (p. 32). These thoughtfully planned movies intentionally taught children how to be their authentic selves and recognize and accept our authentic feelings; "for Danes, authenticity begins with an understanding of our own emotions" (p. 33). Children being able to be true to their own personalities and beliefs is what Alexander and Sandahl highlighted as an important aspect of childhood growth.

The teaching of how to reframe thoughts and language can have significant benefits to help

understand how your thoughts are connected to your behaviours. Alexander and Sandahl stressed the importance of how the Danes wanted their children to gain the ability to reframe their thinking and language more positively. As stated in the book, “they change their expectations to focus on the bigger picture rather than getting trapped by one aspect of an argument” (p. 53) and “Danes are what psychologists call realistic optimistic” (p. 53) which demonstrates that they do not ignore the negatives but instead emphasize the positives by being able to evaluate and understand aspects of both. The Danes automatically are able to go through the process of reframing without much thought or effort; “realistic optimism just seems to be a default setting in Denmark; these language choices associated with reframing are passed on through generations” (p. 56). The Danes believe this must be instilled into their children and they may learn from parental demonstration.

Obtaining the ability to understand and feel what another person is experiencing demonstrates being empathetic. As Alexander and Sandahl explained, "Parents have a big responsibility because they are the primary example of empathy and must practice being empathetic themselves" (p. 84), which implies that children learn and mirror the actions of their parents when it comes to displaying empathetic tendencies. Parents must teach how to be empathetic towards others by explaining interpretations of other people's emotions and what they symbolize so the child is able to make a connection. The responsibility of teaching children the importance of empathy has significantly benefited the growth and maturation of the child, as Alexander and Sandahl expressed; "fostering empathy in children early on helps them create better, more caring relationships in the future" (p. 85). Learning empathy, problem-solving, self-control, and how to read facial expressions was a part of the national program in the Danish school system,

which aids in conceptualizing one's and others' feelings (p. 86). Empathy surrounds children's daily lives; as Alexander and Sandahl explained, the Danes think the exposure is beneficial as it is a learning opportunity.

Alexander and Sandahl illustrated a precise and concrete outline of what attributes are recommended to compose a person's identity, alongside parental advice to help promote these attributes. The authors conducted this book through research revolving around Danish people. Their book is an excellent way to educate people and gathers insight into how other people worldwide have different parenting approaches and what they view as crucial characteristics when aid in the growth and development of their children. Alexander and Sandahl shared the connections between all the different attributions throughout the book, which allows for a deeper understanding of why these attributes are seen as crucial characteristics in youth. For example, reframing ties into resilience in the aspect of being able to reduce negative emotions through interpretations while being knowledgeable about how to handle these negative situations and inversely see the positive aspects; "the ability to refrain from negative situations is a key element to being resilient" (p. 54). However, I feel that Alexander and Sandahl could have included more examples of how other countries chose to parent their children as it would have allowed for comparing and contrasting how the Danish people parent which seemingly results in the happiest people in the world. A select group of people that I feel would be engaged by this book would be anyone that is interested in different parenting approaches and the process of child development studies. I would recommend this book to anyone that is interested in childhood development and ways different parenting approaches can be beneficial, also including academics such as sociologists, psychologists, social workers and others.