



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

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Jessica Joelle Alexander and Iben Dissing Sandahl's book, "The Danish Way of Parenting", is a cohesive combination of the sociological understanding of Danish parenting. It also serves as a guide for parents on how to implement the Danish way of parenting in their real lives. In Alexander and Sandahl's book, they attempt to avoid judging other parenting philosophies and focus on peer-reviewed scientific studies to show the effectiveness of Danish parenting. Alexander and Sandahl also use personal stories from Alexander's experience of being an American raising Danish children and her struggles in changing her way of thinking to adopt the Danish parenting style. The combination of scientific evidence and personal struggles and experiences is engaging and shows the effectiveness of the Danish philosophy. The acronym (PARENT) is used throughout the book. P is for play, A is for authenticity, R is for reframing, E is for empathy, N is for no ultimatums, and T is for togetherness and hygge. The audience of this book is parents and academic professionals such as sociologists and child psychologists interested in learning how Danish people raise capable children. This book is organized into chapters that each focus on specific aspects of Danish parenting. Each chapter contains underlying themes that all relate to the values of Danish parenting and the PARENT acronym.

Alexander and Sandahl discuss the importance of play, "by 'play' we don't mean play the

violin or play a sport or even go on a play date in which adults have organized activities. We mean ‘play’ in which they are left to their own devices, with a friend or alone, to play exactly as they see fit, for as long as they want” (p. 11). Alexander and Sandahl discuss scientific inquiry about the evolutionary purpose of play “scientists have been studying play in animals for years, trying to understand its evolutionary purpose. One thing they are finding is that play is crucial for learning how to cope with stress” (p. 19). Alexander and Sandahl demonstrate that play, and the way children are able to play has an evolutionary purpose and affects children emotionally, especially with coping skills..

Alexander and Sandahl discuss how Danish parents use authenticity and focus not only on the choices parents make but also on the influence that storytelling has on children. They focus on the fairy tale ending and how that may be harmful to children. Danish films “would touch on sensitive, real and painful issues that didn’t wrap it up in a nice bow.” (p. 32) Alexander and Sandahl use the difference between Danish films and American films to show the value of authenticity and how the lack of authenticity is not only because of the parenting style but also because of social factors like media and films. They use research to support their claims: “Communication professors Silvia Knobloch-Westrick and colleagues at Ohio State University have done research that has demonstrated that contrary to popular belief, watching tragic or sad movies actually makes people happier by bringing attention to some of the more positive aspects of their own lives. It tends to make people reflect on their own relationships with gratitude and perspective, leaving us feeling enriched and more in touch with our own humanity” (p. 32). This helps support their claims that the Danish way of accepting sadness and using media to not make

themselves feel better but to appreciate that their own lives have positive outcomes, compared to the American use of movies to be an escape, and show lives that are unrealistically happy.

Realistic optimism is how Danish parents frame circumstances and their word choice towards their children. Alexander and Sandahl show an example of how a Danish person would respond in a realistic optimism way “ask a Dane how he thinks the weather is when it is freezing, grey, and raining out, and he will unwittingly answer: ‘well, it's a good thing I'm at work!’ ‘Glad I'm not on holiday!’ ‘I am looking forward to cozying at home inside tonight with the family’. There isn't bad weather, only bad clothing!” (p. 52). They show a real-world example of realistic optimism and how re-framing your word choice can change the view of a situation to a positive one while still being realistic.

Alexander (Jessica) shares a personal story about her and her sister's relationship and how before using the Danish view on empathy, their relationship was strained and not very close. Alexander and Sandahl describe how seeing a Danish sibling relationship change their perspective “it wasn't until Jessica saw her husband's relationship with his brother that she wondered if there was perhaps a better way. The two Danish brothers had just as many differences and issues as the two American sisters, but Jessica's husband always approached them with understanding and forgiveness rather than eye rolling and exasperation, and they had a very good relationship despite their differences” (p. 74). Sharing personal stories about how the Danish philosophy of empathy helped strengthen personal relationships shows that the practices in this book are achievable by people even if they were not raised in this manner.

The use of ultimatums in parenting is common practice in American households but it is not in Danish households. Alexander and Sandahl discuss the use of ultimatums and how they can

lead to controversial ways of disciplining children, for example, spanking and physical action, “once the ultimatum is out there and all resources are exhausted, the parents feel they have to follow through to regain control, and this ends up in spanking, screaming, or physicality of some sort” (p. 99). Alexander and Sandahl describe the four parenting styles and how depending on which parenting style a person has usually determines the outcome of the child's social skills, coping skills, and future parenting styles of their own. The four parenting styles they discuss are authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved.

Alexander and Sandahl use the term *hygge* “too cozy around together” (p. 123). *Hygge* is an important Danish philosophy and is considered a way of life “The word *hygge* dates back to the 19th century and is derived from the Germanic word *hyggia*, which means ‘to think or feel satisfied.’ It is a virtue, a point of pride, and a mood or state of mind. *Hygge* is something Danes identified with both in action and in being - it is part of their cultural function” (p. 124). Alexander and Sandahl discuss studies that show how close social ties can affect someone’s health, “in another famous experiment on health and social ties, Sheldon Cohen, of Carnegie Mellon University, exposed hundreds of healthy volunteers, who completed questionnaires detailing their social lives, to the common cold virus and then quarantined them for several days. The results showed that the quarantined participants with more social connections were less likely to develop a cold than the participants who were more isolated in their lives.” (p. 131) By using this study, Alexander and Sandahl display the real and possibly detrimental implications of not having strong social connections.

Alexander and Sandahl aim to demonstrate the strengths of the Danish way of parenting while also giving tips and insight for parents who want to implement the Danish way of parenting

in their lives. Alexander and Sandahl attempt to remove bias against American parenting and simply compare Danish parenting with American parenting to show how the two parenting styles differ. Throughout the book, Alexander and Sandahl show as little personal bias as possible when comparing Danish parenting to American parenting. The use of scientific evidence to support the positive effects of Danish parenting with personal stories and struggles on how switching parenting styles can be difficult strengthens the message of the book. However, I believe that the book would be a more accurate representation of Danish parenting if it also included the negative aspects and struggles that Danish parents have. Alexander and Sandahl demonstrate the negative aspects of American parenting yet fail to show any struggles or negative aspects of Danish parenting which skews the message to the reader. However, “The Danish Way of Parenting” is engaging, easy to read, uses accessible language, and explains scientific terms so that people who are not scientists or sociologists will be able to comprehend and possibly use the information in their daily lives. I would recommend this to readers who are parents, sociologists, and child psychologists interested in how other cultures raise their children.