

Real Kids in an **Unreal** World

How to build resilience and
self-esteem in today's children...



**2nd
Edition**
REVISED &
UPDATED

Maggie Dent

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How to build resilience & self-esteem in today's children

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***“To the world you may be just one person,
but to one person you may be the world.”***

– Josephine Billings

Dedication

This book is dedicated to three very special women who became a really important part of my sons' lives. These caregivers loved and cared for my precious sons in our home from time to time while they were children. Each beautiful soul became a part of our family and a special part of the happy memories we all have of those magical, chaotic years.

Thank you so much

Kate Leigh (dec)—“Our Kate”

Jenny O'Halloran née Trigwell

Chrissy Paisley

Respectful acknowledgement

I pay my deepest respect to the traditional custodians of the land where I was born and raised—The Noongar peoples of Western Australia. And I also pay my respects to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, past and present, who have also walked and cared for this land for over 40,000 years. May we all find ways to walk gently and compassionately on these ancient lands and come to a place where all children born have a sense of belonging deeply.

Special thanks

My first thank you goes to the Western Australian Department for Communities for giving me the privilege of running the Enriching Resilience in Children initiative way back in 2007 and especially Tiffany Garvie who helped me create the resources for the families of WA.

I offer my deepest thank you to the following special people in my humble life:

To my former wonderful PA Liz Guidera who helped me so much—thank you Liz for managing my diary and for supporting my passion to help families in the healthy raising of children.

To my graphic angel and special friend and former student from Albany Katharine Middleton who has been my typesetter and graphic designer for years—thank you again for another book birthed and now updated (does that mean re-birthed?) safely.

To my original editors and proofreaders, Janney Wale and Tiffany Garvie, who tamed my text and corrected my syntax with such skill. A special thanks to my current editor, research assistant and publicist Carmen Myler for helping me with this updated version. My other amazing team member I want to thank is my current PA Laura Browning—thank you for helping your aunty get to places in every corner of this big brown land.

To my still supportive and patient husband Steve who has been there every step on this journey. Thank you for the cups of tea, the shoulder rubs and healthy snacks. I couldn't do what I do without you babe. Huge thanks.

To my amazing four sons—Michael, Ben, Alex and James—who have been both wonderful teachers and students in my life journey and who continually make me feel blessed.

To my new four-legged secretary and support Hugo Walter who, like our Jess—now watching in spirit—has kept me company whenever I was in my office writing.

So much has happened since I wrote this book in 2007—I have written two more major books and several smaller books and e-books. I then moved from Dunsborough in WA to the Northern Rivers area of NSW to a special village called Uki. I have now relocated to be closer to my sons in Sydney and am loving being Nanny Mag to my very welcome, awesome grandchildren.

While this book still sits safely and wisely upon ancient knowledge and research, we needed to add the latest changes and challenges of parenting in today's busier-than-ever world.

— Maggie

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Once upon a time

Homo erectus, an early form of human, existed somewhere between 2 million and 100,000 years ago. This human walked upright and used fire and rudimentary tools. From these early beginnings humans have evolved and made changes in response to their environments. For homo erectus to survive, the species had to learn how to live in communities and successfully raise children.

Homo sapiens, or modern humans, appeared 195,000 years ago. This human lived in tribal communities all around the globe. Communities needed the cooperation of everyone to survive from day to day. There were clear divisions of labour for men and women. Very specific social and cultural patterns of interaction were also played out in these very early communities. Everyone was committed to working toward the greater good of the tribe in order to maximise survival.

Indigenous tribes around the world continued living this way. Communities in parts of Europe continued developing, and after the Middle Ages they eventually adopted what has become the Western way of living. The Australian Aborigines lived in the same types of communities for up to 50,000 years before the arrival of white settlers. They took care of their country, their culture and their tribes, both holistically and respectfully.

The tribal approach to living was communal. Children were raised as part of the community, which meant that everyone shared in the healthy raising of children. The elderly were revered as the keepers of lore and wisdom, and were a valued part of their tribe. Teenagers were prepared for adulthood, and initiation and ceremony were markers for the beginning of a new stage of life. Communities worked together to feed and protect each other. Members came together to eat, dance, create and share resources.

This tribal approach defines the expression:

**It takes a whole village
to raise a child.**

Introduction

Our modern world is so full of innovations, rapid change, new knowledge and ways of doing things that we should all be in great shape. Unfortunately, we are not. Many parents and teachers are deeply concerned about our children and teenagers, and how they are struggling to manage or cope with the pressures of modern living. We have reached a new level of concern. Both research and statistics support the perception of declining health and wellbeing for our young. Of most concern is the increasing number of children and teenagers who are succumbing to depression, emotional instability, mental illnesses, obesity, and low educational and social competence. Today, many families and communities are struggling.

This book explores how parents can ensure that their children grow healthy, with skills that help them manage living in our modern world and encourage them to become adults who live worthwhile, meaningful lives. The ability to cope with and conquer all that life brings is built between birth and 12 years of age. This book offers ideas about how to build resilience and a positive sense of self in our children. Our modern lifestyle has destroyed the 'whole village' pattern of raising kids. Parents now have sole responsibility for raising their children rather than it being a collective responsibility. We are paying a big price for this individualistic approach to parenting.

Much of the damage done to young children is avoidable or preventable, however let's not disappear down Alice's rabbit hole. There never has been a perfect way of raising children, even in a tribal context. Childhood is a journey and there is no perfect world, parent or way to raise a child. Remember, there is no perfect child. Families today live in a world of massive change and uncertainty. The reality is that in many ways parenting is now harder than it has ever been before. However, real kids can thrive in our unreal world.

Many of the pressures and challenges on families today are invisible. What is helpful on one level can be destructive on another, such as TVs, mobile phones, access to computers (and the internet) and the rapid increase in usage of hand-held devices. The influence of technology in the parenting landscape is one of the biggest concerns of parents and those who work in the area of health and wellbeing of children. Having the ability to give your children the things you were unable to have as a child should be a good thing. Unfortunately, excessive consumerism without healthy boundaries has created a sense of 'entitlement' among many children and adolescents today, and much debt for parents. This factor also creates challenges to raising resilient children, sometimes more so than financial challenges or adversity.

The very experience of having to save for something, or wait for it, makes receiving what is desired so much sweeter. Being able to delay gratification is seen as a key quality for an emotionally mature person. The 'Y generation' has immediate access to plastic credit and the temptations it brings before they have the maturity to manage the full consequences of their actions.

“80% of your chances of being successful in life have to do with your emotional intelligence rather than your cognitive intelligence.”

— Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995).

We know more than ever how the human brain develops as a child grows. This has massive implications for parents and parenting.

Do any of the following challenging questions interest you?

- *How do you build coping skills in your children so that as adults, they successfully manage continuous change in their world?*
- *What are some of the most important life skills to teach your child?*
- *How do you best support a child to grow into who they are 'meant to be', not who you think they 'should be'?*
- *What attributes provide your child with mental and emotional wellbeing?*

- *How do you build character and social competence in your child?*
- *How can parents be mindful of ways to prevent their child attempting suicide—at any age?*
- *What things can you do as a parent to build your child's capacity to manage and cope, while still allowing the child to have a childhood that is safe and life-enhancing?*
- *What things are really important to include in your child's life that supports them to grow into a person who makes the world a better place?*
- *What will help your child be a friendly, cooperative, caring person?*
- *What can you do to ensure that your child realises his or her full potential in life?*
- *How do you ensure that your child develops positive values and a healthy sense of self?*
- *How can you enjoy your parenting journey more?*
- *How do you do all of the above at the same time as running flat out on the treadmill of work and raising children?*

“The strongest oak of the forest is not the one that is protected from the storm and hidden from the sun. It's the one that stands in the open where it is compelled to struggle for its existence against the winds and rains and the scorching sun.”

— Napoleon Hill (1883-1970).

About the author

Commonly known as Australia's 'queen of common sense', Maggie Dent is an author, educator, and parenting and resilience specialist with a particular interest in the early years and adolescence. Maggie was a teacher for 17 years before working as a counsellor with young people and their families, in suicide prevention and in palliative care and the funeral industry.



Maggie is an advocate for the healthy, common-sense raising of children in order to strengthen families and communities. She is a passionate, positive voice for children of all ages.

Now an in-demand writer and speaker, Maggie is a regular contributor to Fairfax's Essential Kids website, *Teachers Matter* magazine and other parenting and education blogs. She can be regularly heard on commercial and ABC radio around Australia, and has appeared on TV programs such as Today Extra, The Daily Edition, Sunrise, ABC News Breakfast, Today and news.

She is the author of nine books, and a prolific creator of resources for parents, adolescents, teachers and early childhood educators.

Maggie is the proud mother of four sons, and an enthusiastic and grateful grandmother.

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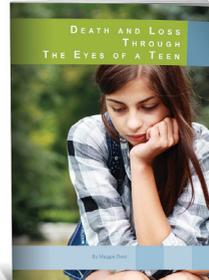
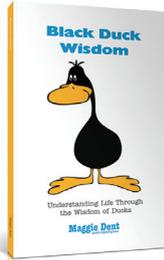
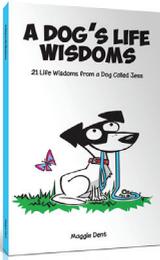
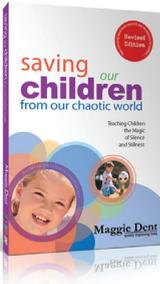
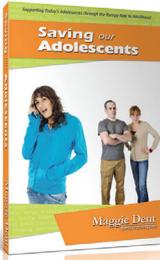
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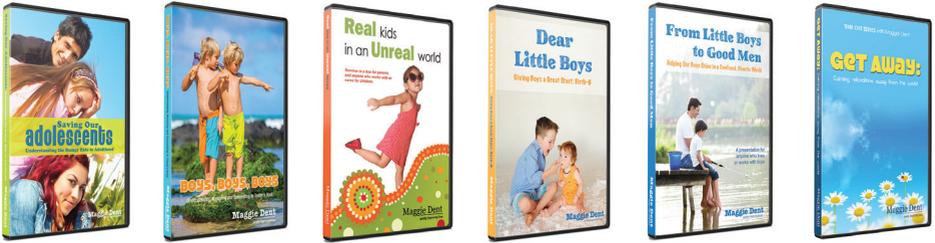
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