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## **Why kids today are out of shape, disrespectful – and in charge**

New book urges parents to reorder life for the sake of kids

Author, physician, psychologist warns of a 'collapse of parenting'

Says families are facing a crisis of authority

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A parent/teacher and a family therapist discuss whether kids these days are more ill-tempered than previous generations, and how to fight that "flush of heat" and embarrassment when a child acts rudely in public. Therapist Robin Kirk shares tips for improving a child's behavior. Claudia Buck and Ed Fletcher The Sacramento Bee

By LEANNE ITALIE

NEW YORK

Dr. Leonard Sax has been a family physician and psychologist for 27 years, conducting workshops around the world for parents, teachers, social workers, counselors, school psychologists and juvenile justice professionals.

He's also a dad, and it's from all those perspectives that he took on his fourth book, an alarm bell of sorts titled, "The Collapse of Parenting," out recently from Basic Books.

This book cover image released by Basic Books shows, "The Collapse of Parenting: How We Hurt Our Kids When We Treat Them Like Grown-Ups," by Leonard Sax. Sax, a family physician and psychologist, argues that American families are facing a crisis of authority, where the kids are in charge, out of shape emotionally and physically and suffering because of it. He calls for a reordering of family life in response. Basic Books via AP

Sax, who lives in Exton, Pennsylvania, argues that American families are facing a crisis of authority, where the kids are in charge, out of shape emotionally and physically, and suffering because of it. He calls for a reordering of family life in response.

A conversation with Dr. Leonard Sax:

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**The Associated Press: What exactly do you mean by a collapse of parenting?**

Sax: I wrote about an office visit with a 10-year-old boy who is sitting and playing a game on his mobile phone, ignoring me and his mom as I'm talking with his mom about his stomachache. And his mom is describing his stomachache and the boy says, 'Shut up, mom, you don't know what you're talking about.' And he laughs.

That would have been very unusual in 1990 or 2000. It is now common: children, girls and boys, being disrespectful to parents, being disrespectful to one another, being disrespectful to themselves, verbally and otherwise. The mother did nothing, just looked a little embarrassed. The culture has changed in a profound way in a short period of time in ways that have really harmed kids.

**AP: What is the book really about?**

Sax: The transfer of authority from parents to kids. I think you should treat kids like grown-ups. I think you should expect them to be mature and to behave, and I think that's what it means to treat someone like a grown-up, among other things, although the phrase to treat someone like a grown-up is ambiguous.

It's not about the abdication of authority.

For example, it's common now in this country to find parents who are chauffeuring their 8-year-old or 12-year-old around to various schools, among families that are choosing a school, and the parent functions as educational consultant. The parent makes a recommendation, but the child makes the final decision. I know of cases where the kid was clearly making the wrong decision and the parents knew it but nevertheless felt completely powerless to overrule their child. The child is the one who suffers.

**AP: What are some other examples?**

Sax: The same is true with regard to a cellphone in the bedroom. You now find kids at 10, 12, 14, 16 years of age who have their phone in their bedroom at two (o'clock) in the morning. You take the device at night and you put it in the charger, which stays in the parents' bedroom. No child should have a phone in their bedroom unsupervised.

That's not just my opinion. That is the official teaching of the American Academy of Pediatrics in guidelines published (in) October 2013. But you would be astonished, or maybe you wouldn't be, how many parents find that an impossible recommendation. They feel that they have no authority over their child in many domains.

**AP: You refer to the value of family dinner.**

Sax: Research shows having a family meal at home without distractions is important. Every day. Not doing that indicates that time spent at home with parents is the least important priority. It doesn't matter. It can be overlooked and forgotten.

By communicating that time at home as a family is our highest priority, you are sending the message that family matters. So many kids are in the race to nowhere, trying to add things on to their resume through extracurricular activities with no sense of why. They just burn out at 15 years of age.

**AP: What about time spent in the car?**

Sax: No earbuds in the car. You commonly have this and kids are not engaging with their parents. Everybody's in a rush. That time in the car is precious. The time in the car is for you to listen to your child and your child to listen to you.

My 9-year-old daughter and I know the lyrics to almost every song from "Mary Poppins."

**AP: What types of things can parents do to help a child or teen become a fulfilled adult?**

Sax: The first thing is to teach humility, which is now the most un-American of virtues. When I meet with kids I ask them what they think it is and they literally have no idea. I've done that from third grade through 12th grade. The high school kids are more clueless than the third-graders.

They have been indoctrinated in their own awesomeness with no understanding of how this culture of bloated self-esteem leads to resentment. I see it. I see the girl who was told how amazing she was who is now resentful at age 25 because she's working in a cubicle for a low wage and she's written two novels and she can't get an agent.

The second thing is to enjoy the time with your child. Don't multitask. Get outdoors with your child.

The last thing: Teach the meaning of life. It cannot be just about getting a good job. It's not just about achievement. It's about who you are as a human being. You must have an answer.