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All Joy And No Fun: The Paradox Of Modern Parenthood

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
JENNIFER SENIOR
**ALL JOY
AND
NO FUN**
THE PARADOX OF
MODERN PARENTHOOD

"A trenchant and engaging book... with extremely impressive research. Sated with insights and epigrams, the book is argued with bracing honesty and flashes of authentic wisdom...
All Joy and No Fun inspired me to think differently about being a parent."
—ANDREW SOLOWEN, *New York Times Book Review*



Synopsis

Thousands of books have examined the effects of parents on their children. In *All Joy and No Fun*, award-winning journalist Jennifer Senior now asks: what are the effects of children on their parents? In *All Joy and No Fun*, award-winning journalist Jennifer Senior tries to tackle this question, isolating and analyzing the many ways in which children reshape their parents' lives, whether it's their marriages, their jobs, their habits, their hobbies, their friendships, or their internal senses of self. She argues that changes in the last half century have radically altered the roles of today's mothers and fathers, making their mandates at once more complex and far less clear. Recruiting from a wide variety of sources—in history, sociology, economics, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology—she dissects both the timeless strains of parenting and the ones that are brand new, and then brings her research to life in the homes of ordinary parents around the country. The result is an unforgettable series of family portraits, starting with parents of young children and progressing to parents of teens. Through lively and accessible storytelling, Senior follows these mothers and fathers as they wrestle with some of parenthood's deepest vexations—and luxuriate in some of its finest rewards. Meticulously researched yet imbued with emotional intelligence, *All Joy and No Fun* makes us reconsider some of our culture's most basic beliefs about parenthood, all while illuminating the profound ways children deepen and add purpose to our lives. By focusing on parenthood, rather than parenting, the book is original and essential reading for mothers and fathers of today—and tomorrow.

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Customer Reviews

Yes, it's one of the best books I've ever read about parenting--and, ironically, it isn't even about parenting. At least not specifically. Senior makes it very clear in her introduction that this is more a book about the history and changing definition of what it means to be a parent, rather than a book of parenting advice. She warns the reader that she will have to sift and sort through the information given in order to find that "advice," but, honestly, I found so much here that will influence my future parenting style and decisions. For example, it was interesting to learn that parenting as we know it is a relatively new concept. It wasn't until after World War II, when the US began enacting child labor laws, that "childhood" came into existence. Before then, our kids were expected to work, contribute, or be invisible. Once we started protecting them more, though, and requiring less and less of them, our kids became, as Senior somewhat playfully puts it, useless. This uselessness (or maybe purposelessness is a gentler word?) has kind of snowballed over time and led to a whole host of other issues, including bored and unchallenged teenagers and parents who have made it their jobs to fill in their toddlers' spare time with hosts of educational, time-consuming, character-building activities. As kids have become more useless, their restlessness has grown--and parents have taken on the burden of relieving this restlessness. In short, one of the lessons I am taking away from this book is that my kids (ages 4 and 2) need to be challenged!--and not necessarily through intense or chaotic play dates and heavily-managed planned activities. Instead, I'm focusing on increasing their responsibilities when it comes to taking care of themselves and our house.

All Joy and No Fun, by Jennifer Senior, is a different kind of book about parenting. There are many how-to books about parenting: how to discipline our children, how to speak to our children, how to raise our children to be successes... the list goes on. But there are almost no books about parents. By talking directly to parents and carefully reviewing the existing scientific literature, Senior has crafted an incredibly insightful and easily accessible book about what happens to parents as a result of parenting. Senior takes us through the various stages of parenting: planning, early childhood, the middle school years, and adolescence, making pointed and careful observations about how having children changes us, burdens us, and truly enriches our lives. Senior makes no

bones about who she is surveying: her book is strictly directed towards middle class parents. She doesn't discuss the upper crust, who can spend the big bucks outsourcing whatever painful parts of parenting they wish to eschew. She also doesn't discuss poorer parents, where financial burdens of existence may supersede many parenting issues in day-to-day life. Modern, middle class parenting was born sometime in the 1940s. Between 1890 and 1920, child labor was banned, and the seeds of the era of the 'useless child' were planted. Since that time, children have been transformed from unsentimental cogs in the family machine to cherished commodities that contribute little to a family's bottom line. Feeding, clothing, educating, and caring for our children places incredible emotional and monetary strain on parents and we have to do this with little overall contribution to the family effort from the children themselves.

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