

This Stops Now: Shattering the Pattern of Perfection, Pressure, and Parenting on Overdrive

"Push with love, not fear, so they rise, not break."

"A gentle nudge builds wings. A hard shove clips them."

*"Your job isn't to push them to your finish line, it's to help
them find their own."*

*"Success isn't in how far you push, but in how well they fly
on their own."*

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Disclaimer

This book is for educational and informational purposes only. It reflects the author's experience and professional insights as a parent, educator, and coach. It is not intended to replace medical, psychological, or nutritional advice. Every family's journey is unique — please seek support from qualified professionals as needed.

The stories and examples shared are inspired by real experiences but have been altered to protect privacy.

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Preface: Welcome to Parenting Today, Any Town, Any Country

This isn't just about the suburbs. Or the cities. Or America.
The pressure is everywhere.

When I first presented my research, *Suburban Student Athletes: Driven to Overachieve*, at the University of Toronto, I assumed I was speaking to a specific group of professionals representing families in wealthier districts, caught in the college prep grind. But after the talk, a professor from Zimbabwe approached me. “We feel this too,” he said. “In poorer communities, the pressure comes from the need to rise up, to get out. It’s the same weight, just wrapped in different circumstances.”

At another event, I spoke to an NFL player who shared his story. He grew up in the projects. The drive to succeed came from within, not from his parents. Still, the pressure to achieve—and to escape—was relentless.

What we’re seeing today isn’t confined to income, geography, or race. It’s global.

Fueled by comparison, social media, competition, and fear.

It’s the pressure to parent perfectly, raise exceptional kids, and keep up with invisible standards we never agreed to—but somehow still feel bound by.

This book is about what that pressure is doing to our kids—and to us.

It's about the rise in anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and disconnection that we can no longer afford to ignore.

It's about pausing long enough to ask: How did we get here?
And how do we get out?

We've inherited generational scripts—from perfectionism to silence, from control to shame.

We've added newer layers: internet culture, constant feedback, tools on tools on tools.

And now many parents—especially younger ones—are frozen, overwhelmed by choices, and unsure if they can trust their instincts at all.

We can't parent from a place of panic.

We can't model peace if we're running on pressure.

But we *can* take a breath.

We *can* tell the truth.

We *can* learn a new way, and break the cycle

FOREWORD

For seventeen years, I taught at a community college. My classrooms were full of students who worked nights, cared for younger siblings or their own children, and still showed up to class with their homework in hand. They were piecing together tuition from paychecks, financial aid, and sometimes the loose change they kept in their cars. Every single grade they earned had been fought for—with time, grit, and sacrifice.

Then, I spent four years teaching at a prestigious private school with tuition that could buy a small house in some states. In those hallways, it was common for students to drive luxury cars to campus, to travel abroad on long weekends, and to have private tutors on speed dial. College was a given. Life's biggest safety nets had been installed before they even realized they might fall.

Living in suburbia in California, I've seen firsthand what gets celebrated—and it's rarely the underdog. I've watched people wrinkle their noses when they hear the words community college, as though it were a consolation prize instead of the triumph it often is.

But I'll say this plainly: I am far more impressed by the student who worked a double shift, took the bus, and studied in the breakroom than I am by the student whose parents took care of everything. Because when you've had to build your own ladder, every rung you climb means more.

INTRODUCTION

This Is a Book About Breaking the Cycle

We were under-parented. Now we're over-parenting. Perhaps, our kids will strike the right balance with their children.

We absorbed hustle culture, perfectionism, diet talk, and disconnection as normal—and now we're handing it to our kids in new packaging: academic pressure, over-scheduling, clean eating, curated happiness.

But here's the good news: We can stop. We can look in the mirror. We can choose something different—aligned with our actual values, not what culture or social media demands.

This book is about that moment. That pause. That shift. It's about raising our kids without recreating the pressure we lived through—and healing ourselves in the process.

Part I: Parenting in Pressure Culture

Chapter 1: The Gold Star Trap

We all want to encourage our kids. We want them to succeed, to feel proud, to be seen. And when they do well—whether it’s an A on a test, a goal in a game, or a solo in the concert—we want to show them we’re proud. That’s natural. That’s love.

But somewhere along the way, encouragement turned into expectation. Praise became performance. And perfectionism quietly replaced presence.

If you were raised in a culture of gold stars, report cards, ribbons, and honor rolls, you likely internalized a message: you are what you achieve. You are as good as your last grade. Your worth is measurable, stackable, rankable.

And now, without meaning to, many of us are handing that same message to our kids.

We celebrate the “A” before we ask if they learned something. We cheer the goal before we ask if they had fun. We share the photo before we sit in the moment.

When Praise Becomes Pressure

One mom from Meadow Ridge (a pseudonym for a suburban town like many others) recalled how her daughter burst into tears after scoring a 92 on a math test. “I didn’t even realize how much she thought I expected 100s until that moment,” she said. “I thought I was being supportive—turns out I was adding pressure.”

Another parent shared: “My son wouldn’t try out for the school play because he said he wasn’t ‘the best’ at acting. When did being good at something become a prerequisite for doing it?”

These stories are common—and revealing. They show how quickly motivation can turn into fear, and how easily joy gets replaced by anxiety.

In one group session, a student named Liv confessed, “I only post about the stuff I win. I don’t even tell my parents when I mess up. I can’t handle the disappointment in their faces.”

Another teen, Nolan, admitted: “If I didn’t get into honors science, I felt like I didn’t exist at school. My whole identity was just... being the smart kid.”

You Are Not Your Report Card

In our culture of high achievement, we’ve confused worth with output. But our children are not their GPAs, their stats, or their resume-building extracurriculars. They are not data points. They are artists, explorers, storytellers, and daydreamers. They are kids.

And they deserve to be loved—and celebrated—not for what they produce, but for who they are becoming.

The Cost of Conditional Praise

When praise is tied too tightly to performance, kids may:

- Avoid trying new things unless they're sure they'll succeed
- Base their self-worth on approval
- Struggle with anxiety, burnout, or perfectionism
- Miss out on internal joy because they're always chasing external validation

A Story: The Trophy Shelf

In one family, the living room wall was lined with trophies—dozens from soccer tournaments, spelling bees, and science fairs. “I thought I was showing how proud I was,” the dad said. “But one day, my daughter said, ‘You only brag about me when I win.’ I realized I’d built a shrine to achievement, not to her.” It was a moment of reckoning.

He took down the trophies and instead framed a photo of her at the beach, laughing and windblown. “That’s my real kid,” he said. “Not just the winner.”

How to Course Correct

The antidote to outcome-obsession isn’t indifference—it’s intentionality. You can shift your praise to focus on process, effort, and joy. Try:

- “You worked really hard on that.”
- “I loved seeing you so focused and curious.”
- “What did you learn?”
- “Did you enjoy yourself?”
- “I noticed you helped your teammate. That was kind.”

These are the seeds of intrinsic motivation. And they're what build resilience—not just resumes.

Conversation Starters for Families

Use these prompts to explore how achievement and identity show up in your family:

1. When do you feel most proud of yourself—and why?
2. What's something you enjoy even if you're not "the best" at it?
3. How do we celebrate effort in our family?
4. Are there times you feel pressure to succeed to make someone else happy?
5. What would it feel like to do something just for the fun of it?

Use these during dinner, car rides, or quiet time. Let them spark honest dialogue.

Worksheet: From Praise to Process

Use this worksheet to reframe your praise patterns. With your child, fill in:

- One thing I tried recently, even though I wasn't sure I'd be good at it:
- One thing I enjoyed just for the sake of doing it:
- One time I felt proud of myself for trying or helping, not just winning:
- Something I'd like to try just for fun:

Hang it somewhere visible. Celebrate those moments, too.

This isn't about never celebrating again. It's about celebrating what matters.

Your child's worth—and yours—was never meant to be measured by a scoreboard, sticker chart, or gradebook.

Let's loosen the grip. Let's unhook from the outcome. Let's raise whole humans—not just high achievers. Let's make room for late bloomers, re-starts, and slow-and-steady wins. The track isn't the same for everyone—and it was never supposed to be.