



**"This book has changed my happiness, my home space,
my child, and our relationship. TRULY AMAZING!"**

'For once a book that empowers, encourages and leaves its readers (parents) feeling positive about their parenting instead of deflated that they can't live up to all that's expected of them. Thank you for this book! I'm sure it's going to make a huge difference to a lot of people!'

Kristie Visser, mother of four

'It's nice to see how much I have grown as a mum. After making the changes I needed, I haven't looked back and my family has blossomed just as I had hoped and knew they would. Thanks for being the inspiration for that. I know your book will help and inspire others all around Australia and beyond!'

Rhiannon Colarossi, mother of one

'I was thinking just yesterday about your two lovely little books, *Full Belly* and *Little Bundle*, and that they should be mandatory reading for all mums either pregnant or with newborns. I still grab a copy whenever I can as a gift for friends. I think your new book, *The Parent Manifesto*, should also be a government handout in hospitals. In fact, they all should be!'

Jo Duncan, mother of two



Also by Jodie Benveniste

*Full Belly:
Comfort and inspiration
for pregnancy and birth*

*Little Bundle:
Comfort and inspiration
for baby's first year*

Jodie Benveniste is a psychologist, author, parenting expert, and the director and founder of Parent Wellbeing.

She is the author of five books including the highly acclaimed *Full Belly: Comfort and inspiration for pregnancy and birth* and *Little Bundle: Comfort and inspiration for baby's first year*.

Jodie brings a wealth of professional and personal experience to her work. She uses workshops, books and speeches to guide and mentor parents. Her empathy and passion offer comfort, inspiration and insight.

Jodie is also mum to two children.

For more information, please visit www.parentwellbeing.com

The Parent Manifesto

**How to create a parenting approach
that's perfect for your family**

Jodie Benveniste

Parent Wellbeing
www.parentwellbeing.com



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The Parent Manifesto book group read this book as it was being written, gave feedback and contributed their stories. They are an amazing group of parents, and their contribution was invaluable.

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Preface

My parenting journey began in September 2002 when I discovered I was pregnant.

The journey since then has been enthralling and enlightening, but also a little overwhelming.

It has included newborn turmoil, toddler antics, preschooler pleasantries – and, now, two children at school.

Along the way, I've learnt a lot about child development, human relationships and family cohesion. I've also learnt a lot about myself.

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I've learnt to be more patient, more self-aware and more compassionate. I've also learnt to be less judgemental, less controlling and less self-centred.

I've sometimes been forced to learn these lessons against my will.

I've been dragged kicking and screaming from 'I DON'T need to change' to 'Oh yes, I did really need to change, and life is so much better now. Thank you.'

It hasn't been easy, but it has been phenomenally worthwhile.

What has helped has been a commitment to learning and growing, and a willingness to be imperfect and make mistakes.

What hasn't helped is not believing in myself.

I've had to learn to back myself, and look after myself. And the best way I found to achieve this is to work from a strong foundation: This is who I am, and this is how I want to raise my family.

I've always maintained that there is no one right way to raise kids.

And I've tried to support parents in discovering their own parenting wisdom in my business Parent Wellbeing, and in my previous books *Full Belly* and *Little Bundle*.

But this book brings together all of my professional thinking and personal experience since becoming a parent.

It is a road map and a guide book. But it won't tell you what to do.

Instead, it will help you to back yourself, look after yourself, and learn your life lessons.

Best wishes on your journey. May it be as enthralling and enlightening as mine has been!

Jodie Benveniste



introduction

Introduction

I'm fine but...

A friend rang me the other day. She has two small kids and is studying to be a teacher.

She said, 'I'm doing fine. The kids are great. I'm enjoying study. Hubby's doing okay too. But...'

Then she paused and took a deep breath. '...But I just don't feel like I'm enjoying this as much as I should. I'm tired. I get cranky with the kids. Hubby doesn't appreciate all I do around the house. I mean, I'm fine, but...'

I've heard that 'But...' from many parents. And I've said it myself.

It's a feeling that although everything is okay, you wish it could be a little better. You'd prefer to feel less stressed and to better enjoy everything that's amazing about family life.

For many parents, 'I'm fine but...' defines their experience of being a parent. It certainly did for me.

I was living in Sydney. I'd had a successful career in organisational psychology, management consulting and academic research. Then I had a baby ... and my life changed dramatically.

I had four months maternity leave before returning to my three-day-a-week, flexible job.

One day, I went to pick up my husband from work. On our way back across town, he asked me a really simple question: 'How was your day?' I burst out crying, and could not stop.

That's when I understood: I'd been only coping. I'd been getting by. I'd been doing okay. It hadn't taken much to go from coping to not coping. One simple question.

I soon realised there are a lot of parents who are coping, but there are fewer parents who are really thriving.

My biggest struggle was trying to find a place for myself and my wellbeing within the demands of work and family life.

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It was the emotional strain of wanting to be a good employee, a good mother, a good wife, and a good person.

I loved my baby, my husband and my job, but I felt like I wasn't getting the best out of any of them.

I wasn't enjoying my baby or connecting with my husband or benefitting from my work as much as I wanted to.

At first, I didn't know what I needed to do to make things better. Was money the problem? Did I need a different job? Or a bigger house? Or something else?

I soon worked out that more money, a different job or a bigger house would have been only temporary fixes. I needed something simpler. Something close to hand that I had real control over.

I needed a shift in my mindset.

When I began reflecting on my problem, and the problem that many other parents face, I started to wonder if there was something bigger going on – and there is.

Here's the problem.

Kids don't come with a manual

Just imagine for a moment that they did.

Your child won't sleep through the night. You open your manual, and, hey presto, there's the answer!

Your child won't eat the beautiful, healthy food you make. You open your manual, and there are 20 sure-fire recipes they will always eat.

Your child's good behaviour is sporadic. You open your manual, and there's a chapter: 'Good behaviour guaranteed.'

If only.

Some parenting books do promise success.

Child won't sleep? Easy! Follow a strict sleep, feed, play routine, and there will be no more night-time waking.

Fussy eater? No problems! These recipes tempt even the pickiest of eaters.

Whinging, whiny kids? Simple! Follow steps 1, 2, 3 and your child will turn into an angel.

But being individuals, kids rarely follow instructions written by someone who doesn't know them.

Instead, most of us bumble along fighting fires and doing the best we can. Some days we triumph, but other days we feel like life is getting the better of us.

It's no wonder we crave an instruction manual.

Raising kids is hard work. Being a parent requires you to be a:

Psychologist
Nurse
Chef
Chauffeur
Financial controller
Manager
And leader

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All in one.

There is no role in life more challenging.

When you add other pressures like career or work ambitions, your partner's work commitments, family responsibilities, caring for your own parents, a mortgage, and the busy pace of life, it can all get a bit much.

That's why an instruction manual would be handy. It would make life easier.

Here's another problem.

There is no shortage of parenting info

We're living in the information age so there's information everywhere, and on all topics including parenting.

The real problem isn't a lack of information. It's that parenting information is often contradictory and confusing.

Your baby doesn't sleep through the night. What can you do?

Some experts tell you to 'teach' your baby to sleep, which involves, to varying degrees, leaving your baby to cry.

Other experts tell you to sleep with your baby and never let her cry.

Both approaches suggest that their method is 'best for your baby'.

But the two approaches are diametrically opposed, so how can they both be right? And what are you supposed to do as a parent?

What the advice doesn't tell you is that what's best for you is often what's 'best for your baby'.

If you're uncomfortable letting your baby cry, or if you don't like co-sleeping, following someone else's methods won't work.

You decide how to care for your children based on the person you are.

If you don't follow your instincts, if you're always second-guessing yourself, or if you don't make decisions based on your own values, your confidence as a parent can erode.

Unfortunately, parenting instinct has been replaced by parenting information overload. That's a big problem.

And there is another reason why we're feeling the pressure to get parenting right.

Parents are under scrutiny

A celebrity mum is photographed walking across the road whilst bottle-feeding her baby.

A new website is launched to help parents find kid-friendly restaurants and cafes.

A photograph of a child sitting in a dinghy fishing with her dad appears in a national magazine.

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And there is furore! There are letters to the editor. There is fervent online discussion.

A baby should be fed whilst seated comfortably!

Kids in restaurants are so ill-behaved. Parents should stay home!

That child should be wearing a life jacket!

There is so much scrutiny. But why?

We know a lot more these days about what contributes to a happy, healthy child, and what leads to good outcomes in adulthood.

And we know that parents play a major role in raising happy

and healthy kids. So parents have become targets for information and advice.

Government bodies, health professionals, education experts, parenting experts, advertisers, family, friends, and even complete strangers all want their say.

Others in the community don't necessarily want to help parents care for their kids, but they do want to tell parents when they're doing something wrong.

And with so much research, information and advice, it can seem like there is a 'right' way to raise kids.

So, as parents, we scrutinise ourselves. We question: Am I doing the best I can? Will my kids be okay? Or am I stuffing them up?

And we scrutinise other parents. We judge: I'd never do that! How can they let their child get away with that? She is always so calm and in control. If only I could be like her.

But if we were all feeling confident in our own abilities as parents, would we feel the need to scrutinise ourselves and others so much?

I don't think so.

And if we understood that there is not one 'right' way to raise kids, would we be bold enough to find our own way?

I hope so.

Here's the solution.

There is no one right way to raise kids

There is only your way done with love and care.

So here is my suggestion: Write your own parenting approach.

That's what this book is about.

It's about creating your own parenting approach that suits you and your family. No two approaches will be the same.

It's based on the assumption that you are the expert. You know your kids, your family and yourself.

All you need now is guidance to tap into that knowledge, gain confidence, and create your own style.

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This book offers a step-by-step process to write your own parenting approach. It includes:

Parenting confidence

What you need to know about confidence, happiness, and your own thinking to worry less and enjoy parenting more.

The Parent Manifesto

How to create a manifesto – a set of values and beliefs you'd like to live by as a parent and as a family.

The AAA parenting tool

The seven steps you need to take to manage any parenting problem your way.

Wellbeing tools

Tools to help keep you in top form so that you can better manage your children's behaviour, your work demands, and your family responsibilities.

The good life

How to create lasting change in your life so you raise your kids with confidence, and you don't miss any of the good stuff.

By the end of the book, you will have:

- Explored your current situation – what's working and what's not working
- Created your own blueprint for being the family you want to be
- Learnt practical tools and techniques to raise capable kids, and enjoy doing it

Have you ever joked, 'Kids don't come with a manual'?
Well now they do!

KEY POINTS

- > Kids don't come with a manual, but there's no shortage of people willing to tell you how you should raise your kids.
- > There is so much contradictory and confusing parenting information, and it seems to be replacing parenting instinct.
- > The best way to raise your kids is your way. That's why you should create your own parenting approach to suit you and your family.

How to read this book

The book is designed to be read sequentially from the first chapter through to the last, but it also works if you prefer to dip in and out.

Along the way, you will be asked to stop, reflect and complete a few exercises. The exercises are designed to help apply the lessons in the book to your situation to create meaningful change.

You do not need to complete all the exercises and you don't need to complete the exercises in the suggested order. Try what works for you.

You will also find examples from other parents sprinkled throughout the book in sections titled 'Parent to parent'. If you find them helpful, read on. But if you'd prefer to keep focused on your own situation, please feel free to skip over these sections.

The book is also supported by a website.

On the website, you will find extra resources for each chapter, and an online community of like-minded parents who are either completing or have completed the book.

Use the community as a resource to support, encourage and inspire you as you work your way through the book, and beyond.

Go to www.parentwellbeing.com

PARENT TO PARENT

'It's true that we are losing that natural ability to trust our instincts. When I started mums group, I remember being shocked at how many were using "sleep manuals" to get their baby to sleep through the night from day one. I had waves of doubt as I thought that perhaps I should have been, too. Then I started listening to their horror stories about baby screaming for hours and not settling. The lovely child health nurse reminded us to go home, look at our babies, pay attention, and listen to what our babies were telling us. I've tried to do that all along. But it is so easy to forget and to fall into the perfect child/parent trap. I fall in every day and have to keep reminding myself to climb out. This chapter is a positive reminder that I know the best way to raise my own kids.' **Jo Duncan, mother of two**

PARENT TO PARENT

'I have done a lot of reading, but am also conscious of not over-reading and making sure that at the end of the day I do what feels right. But I find the balance between information and instinct a tricky one as I think both are so important. I agree that confidence is such a pivotal part of parenting. The mothers I look up to seem to have a lot of confidence in what they are doing, and I think that makes a lot of difference, both for their own mental health, and in the way the child responds to them. But how can I be confident if I am so unsure whether what I am doing is right for us? I expect that fleshing out my values a bit more using this process will help me to work out what's right for us.' **Bianca Schultz, mother of one**

PARENT TO PARENT

'I felt like I was looking in a mirror while reading this chapter. It's everything I have felt and experienced in my last six months as a new mum. It has reaffirmed my firm belief in listening to my heart, and not the many ideas of well-intentioned friends and strangers. I was veering off my own path, but I've decided that my initial plans work for us, and that's what matters. I get told all the time "You have such a happy, healthy boy" so why on earth am I going to such lengths to change his routine when this is clearly working for us?' **Amy Dudfield, mother of one**



There's that worry that instead of setting your kids up for life, you're stuffing them up.

You want to give your kids the best opportunities, raise them to be decent human beings, and maintain a loving home life. But raising children can be demanding, daunting and exhausting.

And when you're bombarded with conflicting and confusing parenting information, you feel judged by others, and you wonder if you're the only one who's not loving every moment, your confidence can evaporate.

You *can* create a loving home life, and you *can* worry less, and enjoy parenting more. But only if you raise your kids *your* way. Create a parenting approach that's perfect for you and your family.

You're the expert.

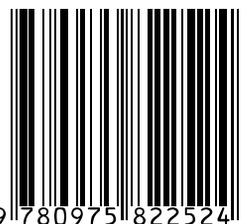
"When my child was born I was constantly researching parenting information to be a great mum. But everything I read conflicted, and I felt confused! Reading *The Parent Manifesto* gave me the confidence to manage the best way I could - my way. I've seen massive changes in my child's behaviour, and my happiness. I'd recommend this book to anyone who's frustrated with pro-forma parenting approaches that sound great but never quite seem to work."

Parent Wellbeing

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