

A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a young child's face, smiling broadly. The child has dark skin and curly hair. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The title 'HOW CHILDREN THRIVE' is overlaid on the top half of the image in a large, white, serif font.

HOW CHILDREN THRIVE

The Practical Science of Raising
Independent, Resilient, and Happy Kids

*New insights into
executive function help parents:*

- Manage sleep, homework, and technology
- Provide consistent, positive discipline
- Build mindfulness into family life
 - Relax and have more fun

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BOOK EXCERPT

Introduction

LIFE AS A PARENT may sometimes feel full of pressure and chaos, but it is my hope that this book offers more simplicity and ease instead. By understanding how children develop self-management skills—various cognitive abilities that build resilience—so much falls into place about our family life. Parenting is complicated and full of uncertainty, but when we stick to what helps children thrive and let go of much of the rest, our lives and theirs become far easier.

Specific developmental skills act like the CEO of a business, keeping track of the big picture. They are involved with coordinating any life experience that requires persistence, planning, and organization. They are vital for problem-solving, navigating social situations, and monitoring our own behavior. They also dictate much of how children learn in the average classroom and how they manage daily routines. These skills, together often called executive function, or EF, as I refer to it in this book, tie together everything for parents, from the why and how of discipline to easier bedtimes to explaining the real-world benefits of mindfulness. A growing body of research shows that strong executive function sets up children for lifelong success.

Modern family life has become more complicated than ever, especially as we find ourselves increasingly bombarded with advice about raising children. Pushed to extremes, we are given the impression that even the smallest decision, from buying a toy to taking a swim class, may have a lasting effect on our children. The pressure to be the perfect parent is overwhelming.

But the truth is, the job is too challenging and varied to ever be done to perfection.

Far too often, a deluge of contradictory information bogs us down rather than helps us make decisions clearer. Everyone from our mother-in-law to our best friend to the author of the hottest celebrity advice book claims to know best. We scramble to keep up with the latest recommendations, even though practically no one seems to agree on how to raise children. You're either pro this or anti that; parenting itself has become political. Overly strident online discussion makes us feel that if we do not listen to what *they* say, mayhem will fall upon our homes.

As a parent and developmental pediatrician, I have found that by moving above the swamp of advice, product placement, and Internet-driven anxiety, there is a more straightforward way to raise children. The world changes, but kids stay the same. At the heart of this book lies a developmental path related to self-management skills—executive function. Most kids walk near one year old, talk near one year old, and eventually learn to handle themselves responsibly—but not right away. When we stick to the common-sense, proven essentials shared in this book, life gets simpler and children become far more likely to thrive.

Attending to simple truths, tying together decades-old experience with cutting-edge research about children, we can let our minds rest knowing we have done our best. Plenty of practical science shows what impacts development most. There are few absolutes, but

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thankfully, between what has proven useful and what has been shown unhelpful, there's a lot of open ground to be ourselves. As it turns out, much of what supports children simplifies modern living; guiding children toward resilience and happiness doesn't mean one *more* thing to do—it's quite often one thing (or more) less.

Part 1 of *How Children Thrive* outlines the developmental path of executive function as it unfolds across childhood. As you'll soon see, understanding the development of executive function all on its own eases life for parents. Part 2 describes how to encourage the development of EF in children, and part 3 integrates EF into straightforward, evidence-based advice around daily challenges like sleep, nutrition, managing technology, discipline, and more. Finally,

because practicing mindfulness directly builds EF, part 4 guides parents around mindfulness and family. Each chapter in the book is concise, can be read on its own (helpful if you get too busy for a while to read the whole book), and ends with something concrete to reflect on or try.

With the executive function–based insights provided in this book, you'll discover a more relaxed, balanced way to raise children. My hope is that you'll also have more fun, without getting lost in parenting worry, swept up in fads, or giving in to pressure to push your children too far or too soon. Child development is a path—and often a winding one. Yet there is an easier way forward. When we meet children exactly where they are developmentally, they flourish and find the balance and joy that allows them to thrive.

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