

Mommy Guilt: Learn to Worry Less, Focus on What Matters Most, and Raise Happier Kids

Julie Bort, Aviva Plock, and Devra Renner.
New York: AMACOM, 2005.

Reviewed by Lynn Loutzenhiser

The goal of *Mommy Guilt* is to “show you how parenting can become more enjoyable for you, your spouse, and your children” (3). The key is simple: mothers need to learn how to recognize and reduce their “Mommy Guilt” and then everyone in the family will be happier.

Based on a large-scale survey of 1300 parents (predominantly mothers), the authors identify the most common guilt-inducing issues for parents of toddlers to school-aged children (for example, yelling too much at one’s children or having an untidy house). They then present a number of strategies to reduce guilt in the context of seven principles that make up the “Mommy-Guilt-Free Philosophy.” The principles are simple and straightforward, such as “laugh a lot, especially with your children” and “parenting is not a competitive sport.” Through the provision of various exercises, readers are encouraged to identify their level of guilt and then minimize it by applying the seven “Mommy-Guilt-Free” principles.

As a practical “how-to” guide, this book is very successful. It is well written and well organized, includes an appropriate amount of humour, and is enjoyable to read. One strength of this book is the inclusion of practical examples of “Mommy Guilt,” alternative ways to think about them, and strategies to deal with them. I particularly like the authors’ use of a developmental approach throughout the book. For example, instead of using the “one-strategy fits all” technique, the authors tailor parents’ guilt-reducing strategies to fit their child’s developmental level. This developmental approach not only assists parents in dealing with their current issues, but also provides them with a glimpse into the future when their coping strategies will need to change.

Although successful at the practical level, this book does little to explain the origins of “Mommy Guilt.” The authors raise the matter all too briefly: “We can’t deny that we are expected to do it all. The question is, who has that expectation? The answer is us” (8). Thus, from the authors’ point of view, mothers feel guilty because of their own expectations. Given that mothers are viewed as responsible for their feelings of guilt, the authors’ strategy of achieving enjoyment from parenting by changing one’s expectations of oneself makes perfect sense. However, blaming mothers for their guilt and ignoring the social and political context in which this guilt occurs does little to further our understanding of the “Mommy Guilt” phenomenon. It also perpetuates

the notion that mothers are solely responsible for familial happiness.

If a critical, social, and political analysis of “Mommy Guilt” is what you are looking for, this book is not for you. If, however, you are seeking practical parenting strategies presented in an interesting and humorous way, you will enjoy this book.

Battle Cries: *Justice for Kids with Special Needs*

Miriam Edelson.

Toronto: Sumach Press, 2005.

Reviewed by Barbara Schwartz-Bechet

As a mother and a professional in the field of special education for over twenty years, I am impressed with Miriam Edelson’s *Battle Cries: Justice for Kids with Special Needs*. Edelson is a well-educated, involved, and resourceful parent who asserts that an individual with a disability is, first and foremost, a person and a family member. Edelson begins her book with a first-person account of her battle for justice and equality for her son Jake, a child with severe disabilities who has since passed away. She describes personal challenges, as well as the obstacles she and her family faced when dealing with individuals and social service agencies. Edelson rightly claims that her best attribute is strength of character. This is evident throughout her book, which is based on extensive research on public policy and private support (see part one) that informs the individual portraits she provides in part two.

Part one describes the “terrain” of the disability realm. Chapters cover topics such as services and supports, the marginalization of mothers who take care of children with disabilities, respite, faith and the community, and how society views individuals with disabilities. Edelson includes factual information regarding services, supports, and policy issues across Canada’s provinces. General tips on how to find services are included at the back of the text; however, a list of contacts, resources, and telephone numbers is a regrettable oversight that would have been invaluable to readers.

Through the voices of mothers and one father, part two presents the “battle cries” of the book’s title. Each portrait presents the story of the child’s birth, life with the family, the education and services that the child and family receive, and how family relationships intertwine with their individual communities. The portraits document the heroism of families who advocate on behalf of their children and show that advocacy and appropriate planning can result in functional lives for disabled children.

Edelson uses her first-hand knowledge of mothering a disabled child and