

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

Happy Parents, Happy Kids

A guide to using *Happy Parents, Happy Kids* as a resource for parent education, parent support, and community-building activities.

“She’s done it again! Ann Douglas has written yet another must-read book for Canadian parents. Based on interviews with dozens of real moms and dads, *Happy Parents Happy Kids* is an engaging, timely, and comprehensive look at parenting culture today, offering insights and strategies that parents can use to create happier, healthier families. If you buy one parenting book this year, *Happy Parents Happy Kids* should be it.”

— Kim Shiffman, Editor-in-Chief, *Today's Parent*

About the book

Happy Parents, Happy Kids is a guide to boosting your enjoyment of parenting while maximizing the health and happiness of your entire family at the same time.

It zeroes in on how you feel about parenting; how you think about parenting; what strategies you use to manage your moods, minimize stress, increase your energy level, and safeguard your physical and mental health — and how you encourage your kids to do the same.

It also talks about choosing the most effective parenting strategies (parenting strategies that work for parents and kids as opposed to parents or kids).

The book — which is based on in-depth interviews with more than 75 Canadian parents and other experts — explores the tremendous pressures that parents are facing these days (all the anxiety, guilt, and feelings of overwhelm) and then proceeds to offer a series of parent-proven solutions that can be tackled at the individual, family, and community level.

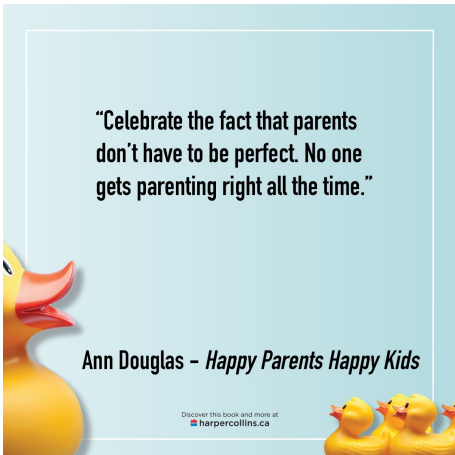
Chapters include “Parenting in an Age of Anxiety,” “Work-Life Imbalance,” “The Why of Distracted Parenting,” “How to Boost Your Enjoyment of Parenting,” “The Guilt-Free Guide to Healthier Living,” and “Finding Your Village.”

How to use this discussion guide

This discussion guide for *Happy Parents, Happy Kids* contains a series of questions designed to spark conversations about some of the key concepts discussed in the book. You will find both general overview questions and more specific questions tied to each individual chapter. You will also find information about related resources, including social media graphics and video content that you might wish to use in guiding online discussions about the book or hosting face-to-face events in your community. (Or both! We definitely encourage you to do both!)

How you choose to incorporate these materials into your group discussions is totally up to you. You can tackle as many or as few questions as you and your group wish. There’s no right way or wrong way to do this, so just dive in, start reading, and start talking!

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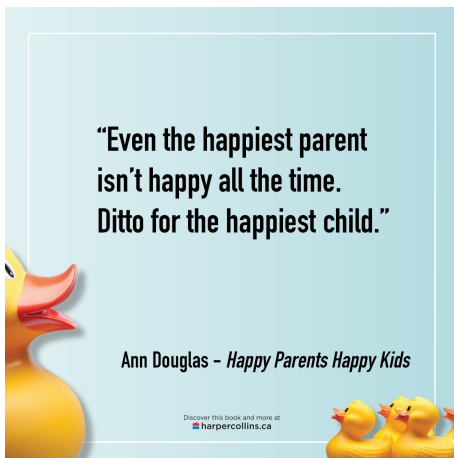


Discussion Questions

What follows are some general overview questions about the book followed by some more specific questions that focus on the contents of each particular chapter.

Overview questions

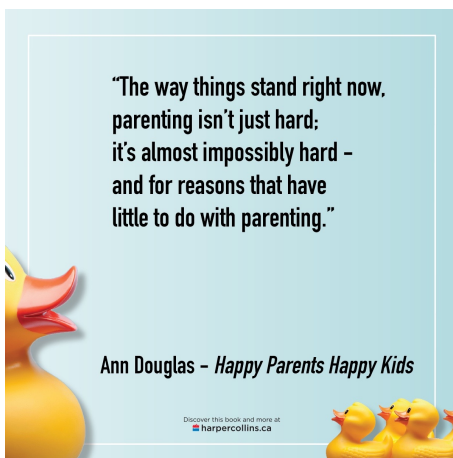
- *Happy Parents, Happy Kids* is based on interviews with a large number of parents. How would this book have been different if those parent voices had been omitted? What is the impact of including them? Did certain stories stick with you? What did those stories mean to you and what did you learn from those parents? Can you think of some of your own parenting stories you might wish to share with other parents? What would you want them to learn from those stories?
- Based on what you have learned from reading this book, what messages of encouragement would you offer to a parent who is feeling anxious, guilty, or overwhelmed? What kinds of things does a parent who is feeling that way most need to hear? What strategies have proven most helpful to you in working through the biggest challenges you've encountered in your own life as a parent?
- Which ideas and concepts discussed in this book are most likely to stick with you? How have you applied (or how are you planning to apply) what you've learned by reading this book to your day-to-day life as a parent?
- *Happy Parents, Happy Kids* emphasizes the importance of tapping into support from other people. Have you benefitted from support from "the village"? Why or why not? What advice would you offer to other parents who are trying to maintain their existing village or to build that village from scratch? How might the content in this book be used to support these kinds of village-building activities? Can you think of ways you could share these ideas with other parents in your community (either online or via face-to-face communities of encouragement)?



- *Happy Parents, Happy Kids* calls on “the village” to do a better job of supporting parents. It talks about the ways that effective public policy can make life easier and less stressful for parents and kids alike—and how that benefits the entire community. Are there certain types of social and economic policies and/or workplace supports that would make your life easier and less stressful? What is on your public policy wish list? What’s on the wish list of other parents you know? How might we move forward together to create a better world for parents and kids?

Chapter 1: Parenting in an Age of Anxiety

- “I feel like every interaction with the kids—every decision that we make as parents—has this huge weight associated with it. How is this going to impact on them as they grow into adults? Is this the right thing to do? Will this set them on the right path?” wonders Katie, one of the parents quoted in this chapter. Do you feel the same sort of pressure that Katie is feeling as a parent? What strategies do you use to work through these feelings?
- Economic anxiety has crept into the lives of parents. Parents are feeling anxious about their ability to provide for their family’s needs today and they are feeling anxious about how their child and their family may fare economically in years to come. Is this something you struggle with in your own life as a parent? How do these types of worries impact on your stress levels and your parenting?
- Parents often feel like they are being judged (as opposed to supported) by the people around them. Have you been on the receiving end of this kind of judgment? If so, how did it make you feel and how did you choose to respond? What advice would you offer other parents who are feeling harshly judged by people they know and/or by the culture as a whole?

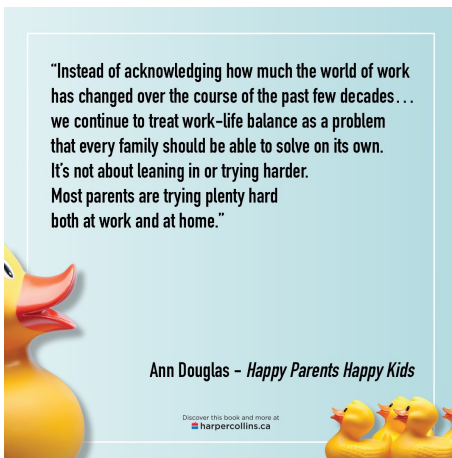


Chapter 2: Work-Life Imbalance

- “There is never enough time to get everything done for work and family, and it often feels like we aren’t doing either particularly well,” says Elaine. Do you struggle with work-life imbalance in your own life as a parent? If so, how does work-

life imbalance affect your own health and happiness as well as your ability to parent in a way you can feel good about?

- Canadian families are experiencing increased feelings of time stress (feeling like there's never enough time to accomplish everything that needs to be done). The shift from one-income to two-income households; the many ways that our embrace of mobile technology has helped to fuel a culture of “total work”; and the rise of non-standard employment and unpredictable work schedules have all served to fuel these feelings. How have these shifts affected your own ability to juggle the competing demands of work and family? What strategies have you used to try to manage the feelings of overwhelm for yourself? What has (and hasn't) worked for you?
- What is your best advice for other parents who are feeling similarly overwhelmed and who may be struggling with role conflict (when work spills over into family life and vice versa)? What strategies do you use to try to “leave work at work”—or is that even possible for you?



Chapter 3: The Why of Distracted Parenting

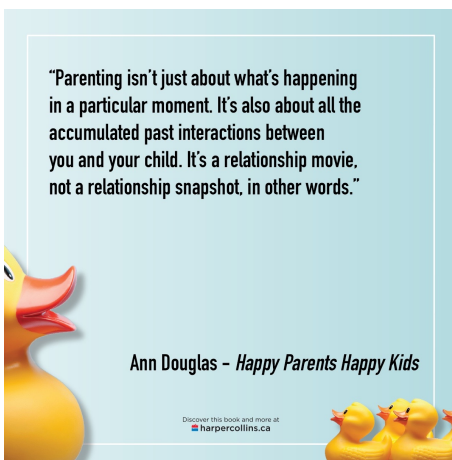
- Instead of trying to make parents feel guilty about their use of technology, this chapter encourages parents to think about why they are turned to their devices for distraction—to get at the “why” of distracted parenting, in other words. What are some of the reasons why a parent might choose to take a break via the closest screen? What are some of the emotions that lead you to reach for your own smartphone?
- What are some strategies parents can use to make technology work for—not against—them and to prevent technology from intruding on their relationships with the people that matter most to them (“Technoference”)? What strategies have proven to be most effective in your own efforts to manage your use of technology?

Chapter 4: The Truth About Parenting

- “Parenting has ended up being everything that I could have expected—and so much more. I expected it to be a full-time commitment, but I don't think I anticipated the full physical and emotional sides,” says Jillian, one of the parents

interviewed in this chapter. What have been the biggest surprises about parenting for you?

- Investing heavily in your relationship with your child can be mental-health enhancing (as opposed to mental-health depleting). Does this make sense to you? What is your best advice to other parents who may be struggling to find the “sweet spot” of parenting (where they feel like they’re able to invest in their relationship with their child in a way that they can feel good about while still having something left for themselves)?
- This chapter also stresses that there’s no such thing as a one-size-fits-all parenting experience. Some parents *do* have a tougher time when it comes to parenting. Some children are more challenging to raise than others. Some stages of parenting are easier and more enjoyable than others. And some parents face an increased risk of parent burnout. What has your own experience of parenting been like? Have certain stages of parenting been more difficult for you? If you’re the parent of more than one child, have some of your children been easier to parent than others? What else has made parenting easier or harder for you?



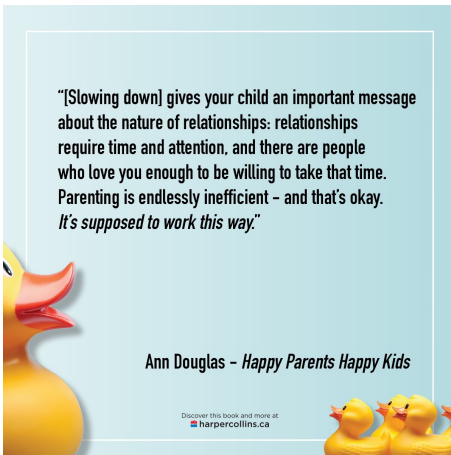
Chapter 5: The Thinking Part of Parenting

- Parenting is easier and more enjoyable if you’re able to parent with your big-picture parenting goals in mind (your hopes and dreams for your child and your family). What are your big-picture parenting goals? How can you connect those goals to the way you choose to parent today?
- Our own experiences growing up can spill over into our lives as parents. What have you learned from reflecting on your own childhood experiences? How can learning from those experiences make you a wiser and more empathetic parent?
- This chapter also talks about “the power of calm” (how calm is the ultimate parenting superpower and solitude is your ticket to that place of calm). Are you able to get to a place of calm as often as you’d like? Why or why not? What advice would you offer to another parent who is eager to feel a little calmer a little more often?

- The chapter wraps up by talking about the risk factors that contribute to parent burnout (namely, sky-high expectations and inadequate resources). Have you struggled with feelings of burnout? Do you know other parents who have? What are some strategies a parent could use for preventing or recovering from parent burnout?

Chapter 6: How to Boost Your Enjoyment of Parenting

- This chapter focuses on getting more of the good stuff of parenting and less of the stuff that tends to wear you down. What does that “good stuff” mean for you? How could you get more of that good stuff in your life? What is the stuff that tends to wear you down about parenting? Is there anything you could do to minimize it or to respond to it differently?
- This chapter also connects the dots between your own personal happiness and your ability to parent in a way you can feel good about. What could you do to become a happier person and how might that make you a happier parent?
- Part of becoming a happier parent is learning how to focus your attention in ways that leave you feeling happier and less stressed. How might you apply this idea to your own life? Which of the strategies discussed in this chapter are likely to be the most beneficial to you personally (for example, savouring positive experiences, switching your brain into discovery mode, making a conscious effort to express gratitude, boosting your feelings of self-efficacy and self-control, and striving to be your “real self” as opposed to your “perfect self”)?



Chapter 7: How to Tame the Anxiety, Guilt, and Feeling of Being Overwhelmed

- Why is it important to develop a “positive stress mindset” and to learn how to be comfortable with uncomfortable emotions?
- Why is it important to have realistic expectations of yourself as a parent? What advice would you offer to a friend who was setting the bar impossibly high for herself?

- Why is self-compassion important? How might learning to treat yourself with self-compassion make parenting easier and less stressful?

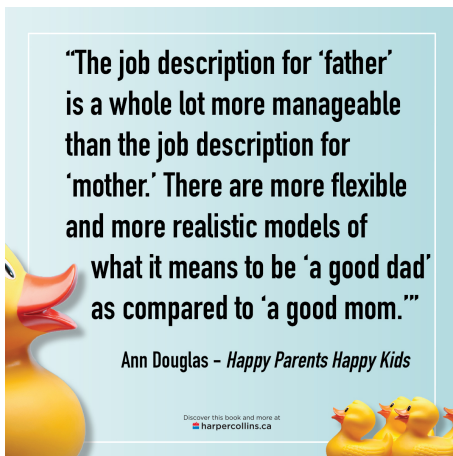
Chapter 8: The Guilt-Free Guide to Healthier Living

- Researchers at the University of Victoria and the University of British Columbia have identified the experience of becoming a parent as “a critical transition point for physical activity decline.” Add to that the fact that sleep tends to be in chronically short supply and the fact that you’re likely to be eating less well and you can see why so many parents struggle to maintain a healthy lifestyle during the most intensive years of parenting. Are you surprised by these findings? How have things played out on the health front for you?
- This chapter talks about why it’s important to prioritize self-care and what self-care actually means. It also discusses the guilt that many parents (and mothers in particular) feel about self-care. (They feel guilty for taking time to take good care of themselves and they feel guilty if they’re not able to take that time.) What does self-care mean for you? What does it *not* mean? What messages do other parents need to hear in order to eliminate some of the guilt associated with self-care?
- The health and wellbeing of the entire family is affected when parents are extremely stressed. Have you observed this in your own family? Do the lifestyle fundamentals (sleep, physical activity, and healthy meals) tend to fall apart during times of increased stress? What strategies do you use to try to turn the situation around for yourself and your kids?
- Are you and your children as physically active as you’d like to be? What strategies have proven to be most effective for making physical activity a priority in your lives? What strategies have proven to be least effective? What advice would you offer to another parent who was trying to figure out ways to be more active as a family (for example, making it fun, heading outdoors, and/or teaming up with other families)?
- Nutrition plays a key role in supporting our mental as well as our physical health. What strategies have proven to be most effective for making good nutrition a priority in your family’s



life—and for ensuring that mealtimes are relaxing and enjoyable? What strategies have proven to be least effective? What advice would you offer to another parent who was trying to figure out ways to make healthy eating a priority for his/her family? Why is there so much guilt associated with the idea of “the family dinner”—and what can we do to minimize that guilt?

- This chapter offers some strategies for turning health intentions into health actions (for example, feeling confident in your ability to make change, making an identity shift, taking advantage of the fresh start effect, having a plan for dealing with obstacles, tapping into the wisdom of your future self, treating yourself with self-compassion). Which of these strategies have been (or might be) the most effective strategies for you?



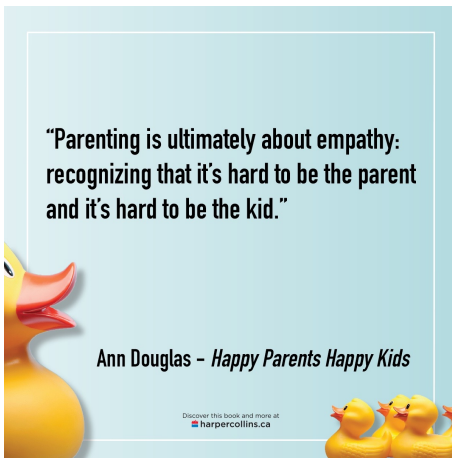
Chapter 9: Parenting as a Team Sport

- “I don’t know how to deal with the level of resentment I have: resentment of the fact that my life did a 180 degree turn after the birth of our son and my husband’s life shifted maybe 45 degrees.... We made the decision to have a child together, but I didn’t realize what a huge impact it would have on my life. And that’s a huge thing,” says Evie, one of the parents interviewed in this chapter. Her comment highlights the impact that having a child can have on the couple relationship. As relationship researchers Philip A. Cowan and Carolyn P. Cowan have noted, 92 percent of couples report an increase in conflict after the birth of a baby, and by the time those babies have researched age eighteen months, one in four couples are experiencing marital distress. What’s more, according to research led by psychologist Erika Lawrence of the University of Iowa, the couples who were happiest prior to the birth of a baby are the ones who are most likely to find the experience of becoming parents particularly jarring. How did the decision to become a parent affect your relationship with your partner (if, in fact, you embarked on parenthood as part of a couple relationship)? What strategies have you used to deal with the resulting relationship road bumps?
- This chapter highlights the kinds of issues that couples fight about most after having kids: resentment over unshared

workloads, conflicts about parenting, conflicts about sex (or the lack of sex), conflicts about money, and spillover from work-life conflict. What types of issues have caused the most difficulty for you and/or your partner? What strategies have you used to try to resolve these conflicts? What have you learned from this experience?

Chapter 10: Parenting Strategies that Work for You and Your Child

- Learning about child development makes parenting easier and less stressful. You feel more confident in your ability to nurture and guide your child's development along. You don't take your child's annoying behaviours quite so personally. You're able to shift from the "what" to the "why" when it comes to responding to your child's behaviour. And you're able to parent with greater empathy. How has learning about child development (including reflecting on the information in this chapter) allowed you to parent in a way that is more in synch with your big-picture parenting goals?
- Children need three things from their parents at each and every stage of their development: unconditional love and approval; warm, sensitive, and responsive parenting; and support for their growing independence and emerging abilities. What are the biggest challenges you face as a parent in providing these three things? How have those challenges shifted as your child has moved from one developmental stage to the next? What are the biggest challenges you are likely to face as a parent in the months and/or years ahead?



Chapter 11: Finding Your Village

- Parents were never meant to parent on our own. Parents need support—and they need it at every stage of parenting. And the village stands to gain a lot by providing this support. Most parents have to work hard at finding or creating this kind of support for themselves (both in their communities and online). And some parents find it extra tough to find and tap into this kind of support. How supported do you feel by your "village"? When do you feel most and least supported? What kind of support do you crave most at this point in your life as a parent?

Where might you find (or how might you create) that kind of support for yourself and your children?

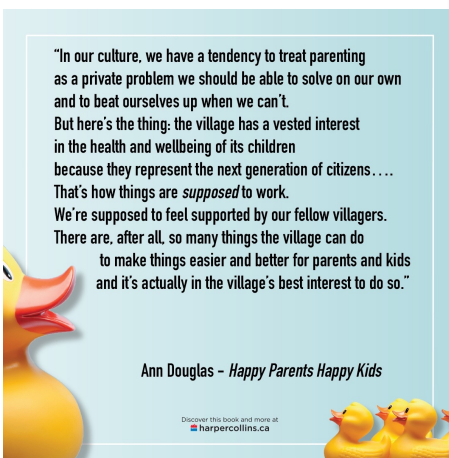
- One of the most powerful messages in this book is about the importance of rebuilding “the village” for ourselves and other parents. Here are some practical things you can do, starting right now, to try to make things better and easier for *all* the parents and kids in your community.

Talk about these issues with other parents. Talk about why parenting is hard and what it will actually take for us to feel less anxious, less guilty, and less overwhelmed. Push back against all the hard-hitting messages of shame and judgment that parents receive on an ongoing basis and spread messages of support and encouragement instead.

Host online discussions about the issues raised in this book and invite other parents (and possibly even Ann!) to join in. Note: You’ll find an online library of social media graphics to support you in these efforts by visiting the official website for this book. (See details below.) Download anything you’d like and please let us know if you’d like us to create a particular graphic with a particular message, based on the content in this book. We want to support your village-building efforts!

Create formal and informal communities of encouragement for parents in your neighbourhood, your child’s school, or your community. Host a *Happy Parents, Happy Kids* discussion group as a means of connecting parents in your community. Use your event as a launching pad for other village-building activities. Ask the parents who come out to your initial event to talk about the kinds of support and encouragement they would like to be able to access on an ongoing basis—and to imagine ways of making that happen for themselves and other parents. Then find creative ways to translate the best ideas into action.

Look for opportunities to invite Ann to be part of your village-building efforts. Maybe you could schedule an in-person visit or invite her to participate via video conference or to send a message of support and





encouragement to your group (which could mean anything from a video to a letter of support). Let's brainstorm the possibilities!

Additional resources

Looking for more additional resources? Visit the official website for this book: www.anndouglas.net.

You'll find

- information about Ann Douglas' upcoming speaking engagements and online events
- social media graphics and other resources designed to support your own village-building activities
- blog posts about all things parenting
- links to podcast interviews, videos, and media coverage for *Happy Parents, Happy Kids*
- information about Ann's other books (including *Parenting Through the Storm* and the various books in The Mother of All Books series)
- details on how to subscribe to one or more of Ann's three newsletters
- links that will allow you to connect with Ann on Twitter (@anndouglas), Facebook (The Mother of All Books), Instagram (@annmdouglas), and Pinterest (@annmdouglas).

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