

The Secure Child: Helping Children Feel Safe and Confident in a Changing World

by Stanley I Greenspan, MD



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Review by Paul Jay Fink, MD

The *Secure Child* is an outstanding book for parents and professionals alike. Although short and easy to read, the book is full of good information and techniques for handling children from birth through adolescence.

The concepts and ideas that Dr Greenspan presents are the result of 30 years of in-depth study of children and their families. The author has chosen to focus his parenting book on the issue of security—a goal made clear by the book’s subtitle—to help our children feel safe and confident in an insecure world. This book was published after the sad and terrible events of September 11, 2001 and refers to them expressly once or twice to help us keep that goal—a sense of security—directly before us.

This book is divided into three major sections: infancy and early childhood; the grade school years; and adolescence. The same themes and techniques are described as they apply to each group, and advice is given in an upbeat, positive, “you-can-do-this” way. The basic needs of children—love, warmth, patience, communication, and listening—are themes interwoven through the book, which is neither preachy nor overinstructive. *The Secure Child* is a friendly guide containing practical ideas that can be implemented by parents or other caretakers who truly wish to give children the ingredients necessary for growing into competent adults who feel safe and have good self-esteem.

Each section of the book is divided into three sections. Without jargon and in a way that allows readers to apply the information to themselves and to their children, the first section of the book describes normal child development. The second section discusses signs of distress and insecurity commonly seen in specific age groups (for example, the chapter on infancy and early childhood discusses “excessive sadness” and “aggression and excessive risk-taking”). The third section—which discusses ways to help children strengthen their sense of security—is particularly powerful because it describes five issues that trouble many parents on a daily basis: 1) how to create “floor time,” the special time reserved for the child every day; 2) how to develop and maintain shared communication; 3) how to

adapt each child’s floor time to that child’s own personality profile; 4) how to develop the parental skill of problem-solving (a section that will resonate with every parent); and 5) methods of setting appropriate limits for children. The problem-solving sections included throughout the book can serve as ready reference for parents trying to cope with specific areas of difficulty.

Woven throughout the book is the concept of security being absolutely essential for children’s mental health as they grow to adulthood. Secure children can learn, obey, think, and develop empathy. *The Secure Child* is therefore also essential reading for practitioners in the mental health and child care professions:

- The book serves as a reminder of how children grow and what they need;
- The book is a wonderful reminder of both the fabulous growth that can occur and the enormous limitations that can be imposed on this growth from birth through childhood and adolescence. The book thus frames the child’s growth as a continuous process throughout which techniques must be modified.
- The book is written in highly readable language that encourages parents to spend time with their children and to communicate with them on an individual basis.

I wish every parent could read this book; it is an important contribution to the literature on parenting. I regret, however, that the book will remain inaccessible to many parents who do not care and who deprive their children of the important ingredients emphasized in this volume: warmth, love, understanding, and empathy.

Stanley Greenspan is one of the great developmentalists of our time. His body of work shows that he is an extremely thoughtful and creative man who tries to understand children and the parent/child dyad. Unlike many other books on child development, *The Secure Child* is not a book drawn from one author’s own narcissistic ideas about children; instead, the book is based on solid research and is written beautifully so that the average parent can enjoy, understand, and use it. ❖

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