



The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon

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Often with the very best intentions, Americans expose their children to overwhelming pressures, pressures that can lead to low self-esteem, to teenage pregnancy, and even to teenage suicide. By blurring the boundaries of what is age appropriate, by expecting—or imposing—too much too soon, we force our kids to grow up too fast, to mimic adult sophistication while secretly yearning for innocence. With the first edition of *The Hurried Child*, David Elkind emerges as the voice of reason, calling our attention to the crippling effects of hurrying. But in the decade since this book first appeared, a new generation of parents has inadvertently stepped up the assault on childhood, misled by the new and comforting rhetoric of childhood "competence." Now Dr. Elkind has thoroughly revised this enormously successful book to debunk the notion of "competence" that has children racing off to early enrichment programs, burdened by the pressure to "achieve," and coming home alone to an empty house after school. He sees "competence" as a notion meant to rationalize the needs of adults, not to serve the genuine needs of kids, a notion that has fourth graders dieting to fit into designer jeans and children of divorce asked to be the confidants of their troubled parents. In updating this new edition, Dr. Elkind takes a detailed and up-to-the-minute look at the world of today's kids in terms of education, movies, television, rock & roll, and social trends, to see where the hurrying occurs and why. And as before, he offers parents and teachers insight, advice, and hope for encouraging healthy development while protecting the joy and freedom of childhood.

The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Too Fast Too Soon Details

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Rebekah Willoughby says

Personally, as an individual, I realize that after reading this book I have a new found way that I look at the world and children around me. As a future parent there are pitfalls that I don't want to fall into. I realize that we are human and we will all make mistakes but I would like to do everything in my power to avoid as much mistakes as possible. There were things that I knew previous to reading this book but didn't quite know why or how to formulate them. There were also things I thought I knew and had no clue about. Such as, the author mentions divorce and it's effects on the children. I thought I could verbalize exactly what the problem would be but until I read Dr. Elkind's point of view I realized I knew nothing. As far the effect this book had on me as a future Early Childhood Professional I would say it was almost like reading a textbook. Even though, I have divided that this was only one man's thoughts and opinions I also realize that this man is decorated, experienced, and educated. To read from a child's psychologist point of view helped me view things professionally and objectively. I focused on my area of future expertise which is Kindergartners. He talked a lot about the ability to read. This is where most children learn to read so I took that part seriously. Professionally, and I suppose as a future parent privately, one of my greatest fears is to expect a child to do something that they are incapable of. On the other hand, to challenge them in a healthy and right way is one of my goals. This book gave me a little more clarification on the balance to that science and on expectations and put me at ease. Although, not completely at ease since I haven't been in the classroom professionally yet and a lot of these anxieties will be quenched with the experience. Overall, I would highly recommend this book to anyone and everyone! As a human being you can benefit from something out of this book for this book is about human nature. Let us all do our part in the preservation of childhood in all it's forms!

Stacy says

Although dated and written mostly to parents. I appreciated the celebration of childhood Elkind shared. I'd like to continue my readings on this topic.

Lacey says

I read this book for my middle childhood class. It was a huge eye opener about how parents are hurrying their children to grow up and expecting too much of them I would recommend this book for anyone who has young children.

Robyn Larson says

I read this book for one of my developmental classes and I love it. Every parent or will be parent should read this. It talks about how we as Americans are trying to get our children to grow up too fast and the consequences we as a nation are facing. Over scheduling and the pressure to do better than everyone else are

just some of the topics discussed. I didn't think I would enjoy it but once I opened the cover, it was hard to stop.

Diane says

I read this book when it was first published and read it again when this updated version was published.

The point of the book is how we hurry our children into adulthood and this topic is one that should really be explored more in schools and in the media. Children need to be children and this book should be a must read for all parents and school districts.

Jacqui says

More of a documentary for a school project, but a definite great read. Something most can identify with.

Jesse says

Dr Elkind beautifully describes the importance of play and having children be children. He details the importance of how excess stress in a child's life can affect their entire life, and how we as a society hurry children into adulthood in a race against the clock...perhaps doing so at their peril. This book mostly outlines the triggers of stress in children, and he touches on Freudian philosophies and Montessori teachings. This is a great read for parents and educators in today's society!

Dianna Caley says

Extremely negative about working mothers and single mothers. The author had some good things to say, but it was hard to get past his clearly biased anecdotal rants against homes that did not resemble the Donna Reed show.

Roger Voth says

Please, don't use your children to fulfill your own wishes. Be their leader, their confidant, their best cheerleader, and the one who loves them deeply from the heart. Teach all you can, challenge them to take responsibility, and realize that they are a unique beautiful person with the possibility of great things wrapped up in fragile paper. They are a gift you are given to care for, not a possession or resource that you can use.

Tara says

"Our new conception of children and youth is epitomized in the metaphor of the Superkid. Like Superman, Superkid has spectacular powers and precocious competence even as an infant. This allows us to think that we can hurry the little powerhouse with impunity . . . The conception of children as competent to deal with, and indeed as benefiting from, everything and anything that life has to offer was an effective rationalization for parents who continue to love their children but who have neither the time, nor the energy, for childhood . . . Our contemporary conception of Superkid, then . . . must be seen as a social invention to alleviate parental anxiety and guilt."

It took me five months to read this book and it was worth every moment. Not everyone will share Elkind's opinions about childhood, but I certainly do. I appreciate seeing even the small ways we can hurry our children and rob them of their childhood, so that I can avoid making those mistakes. I plan to regularly revisit this book as my children grow to reexamine how I can help them become healthy, happy adults through each stage of their development.

Shana says

I read an earlier edition (c. 1989). I'd like to get my hands on the 2001 edition sometime. I would imagine he made many updates, as the hurrying has only gotten worse...

Hannah Deichler says

In this second installment of Dr. David Elkind's development series, he discusses our society and how it is hurrying our children through adolescence. Through the recent emergence of social media and technology, the hurrying is even quicker than before. Our children know more than past generations can even comprehend because of their exposure to the internet and media. Dr. Elkind dives deep into the implications of having unlimited access to the internet and other factors that contribute to the extreme "premature maturing" that is happening in adolescence. Elkind also discusses the problems with clothing companies and why they should start marketing adult clothes to adults only, instead of marketing them to young adults through extra small sizes. The young adult's mind is tricked into thinking they are mature if they're wearing the same clothing as their much older counterparts. Overall, I enjoyed this book. It gave insight into modern society and provided real and relatable information for not only teenagers, but for the parents of teenagers as well. This book was a fascinating and a quick read and I think all parents should read it by the time their children reach adolescents.

Donna Davis says

Folks, don't put mascara on your twelve-year-old, & don't buy it for her, either.

Elkind makes a lot of really strong points here. This book is more geared toward those who are raising children (parent/guardians...so many, many grandparents raising kids these days!) than toward educators, who follow the school or district's policies regardless...

The last chapter draws a lot of extremely conservative conclusions with which I would not care to be associated, and this is why the final star is denied. However, in this day and age in which kids in fifth grade come home and announce they have a boyfriend, in which teensy children are packed off to beauty contests carefully coiffed, manicured, and covered in cosmetics, this is a breath of healthy, let's-get-real common sense.

If you are a parent who is not sure what children should do as they move past early childhood, or if you have questions about adolescents, this is a good read. Sadly, the people who should most read this book probably won't, and those who are already doing a pretty decent job probably will.

Still, highly recommended.

Audrey says

Insightful, and the trend has not reversed.

Marianne Mullen says

Great book for explaining why childhood needs to be preserved and why we need to stop rushing children to grow up so fast. It's a bit outdated but the overall message is powerful. It took me forever to read this but I'm glad I did.

Corbin says

Rife with sublimated sexism; ignores issues of race, class, and culture; ageist; severe backlash against gifted acceleration programs; condones censorship; completely ignores issues of asynchronous development.

jacky says

David Elkind's overall premise is that our society forces children to grow up to fast in many, many different ways. He calls this hurrying. Basically, all hurrying leads to stress, and that stress has many different ways it can affect a child. The bulk of the book discusses how different aspects of family life and culture create these hurried situations and how children respond. Very little time is spent on how to work against hurrying in comparison to the length of the book.

One of my biggest problems with *The Hurried Child* was that it didn't seem fully revised. There was dated research, but at least the information on research gave dates. In other places, it was unclear if I was reading a section that had been revised for the new edition published in 2006 or something originally drafted in 1981. Elkind would share rather old fashion practices such as nylon stockings and long pants as a rite of passage, but then discuss *American Beauty* and *Dawson's Creek* a few pages later. Another example is that just a few pages into the book, Elkind discusses Kindergarten in all states as if it were a new phenomenon, yet then mentions homework for these students in the same breathe. This lack of clarity was particularly troubling

when he discussed broad societal institutions and practices, like education, sports, and day care. For example, when he discusses lengthening the school day and year, cutting recess, and increasing homework as current education trends to combat our poor standing internationally, it is unclear if these are trends from 2006 or years before. Here are some other examples of dated material still in the 2006 edition:

Elkind cites that one in three American women lack "the basic skills needed to earn a reasonable leaving." In 2006? No year was given for this statistic.

One paragraph discusses singles, LPs, CDs and tapes and then downloading music in the next.

The info about the internet is now like internet 101. Pretty much only those who have not kept up with new technology, such as some senior citizens, would not know what he is talking about already.

NEA survey from 1979 about physical violence in schools.

Students being diagnosed as retarded or disabled when they are ELL or hearing or vision impaired.

Seriously? Does this still go on? I can't believe it. I had hearing and vision screening every year from like 1985 - 1995. And the fact that most schools, or at least districts, now employ an ELL teacher, I find it hard to believe that a language barrier would misplace many children

Early on, it was clear that Elkind's text was at least partly guided by his personal political and religious beliefs. After already denouncing modern fashion, Elkind then quotes another man stating that it is the removal of fear surrounding sex that has increased young women becoming sexual active. I find this offensive, since it suggests that we were better off when girls were left in the dark about their sexuality due to societal fears. Later on the same page, Elkind drives home his moral and political point of view by stating that the number of teen pregnancies in the last hundred years hasn't really changed, but the percentage of abortions and children born out of wedlock has increased. Only thirteen pages into the text, it was now extremely clear to me I was reading a book authored by someone who held much more conservative moral / religious and political views than myself. Especially in the first half of the book, I found Elkind's personal views on marriage and sex distracting to his larger topic of childhood stress. I found myself disagreeing with his points about sexual education course quite a bit. I felt he was just not being realistic about when sexual feelings start, let alone when sexual identity begins to form. He says that we should wait until 17 to talk about condoms, abortion, and sexual orientation even though it is just nature causing students much younger, say middle school, to need to think about some of these topics much earlier. In fact, he quotes one expert as saying that sex ed is bad because it teaches that sex is natural and pleasurable for most people, thus resulting in more teen sex. Again, I dislike the hiding of the truth about sex from young people, especially how this comment hints that it is better if we pretend sex is wrong, sinful, and dirty.

When half way through the text he claims he isn't recommending that the only way to not stress children if for one parent to stay home with the children, I couldn't buy it. It was very obvious to me that he did feel that this return to a former family structure would reduce childhood stress. His statements clearly showed he felt we would all be better if mom and dad stayed married for the kids, even if they had married do to an unexpected teen pregnancy, and that mom should stay home with the kids to prevent the stress of various day care situations. I did find many of the ideas in his chapter on parents interesting (though I often questioned how universal), but I felt too much time was devoted to all possible negative aspects of divorce. In particular, I questioned how he constantly came back to divorced / single parents involving their children in important decisions. First of all, he made no age distinctions. Is he talking 5 year olds or 15 year olds? Secondly, while I don't think it is right for a parent to really confide about resentments about the other parent or their new sex lives, I don't think that it is wrong to talk to a child some about other issues affecting the parent and family. And to add insult to injury, he later claims that teachers expect children going through a divorce to have problems, which I never did. To be honest, at the high school level, most kids kept that information to themselves. In fact, this harping on divorce brings up thoroughness. In general, I like it when an author is thorough, but Elkind seemed to be thorough by discussing every possible negative outcome imaginable,

rather than thoroughly backing up his ideas with relevant, recent research or rebutting counterarguments.

Another reason for my disappointment in *The Hurried Child* was that it didn't focus on the types of topics I thought it would. Elkind spends a lot of time discussing parents, particularly two income and / or divorced families. I admit that being a stay at home mom is a luxury these days and I am glad I am able to do it for at least a few years. In fact, I'll admit, that I often feel pride, sometimes to a sinful degree, that I am able to stay home and provide my daughter (and soon my son) with my personal care all day long. But, like I said, this is a luxury. After a while, I felt Elkind was coming down too hard on these families. While I believe some divorces are due to taking marriage too lightly or other immaturities and that some working families could survive quite comfortably with one income, that is not the case for many. In fact, I don't really know any two income families that have both parents working because both parents are dedicated to their career's or their high class lifestyle. All the families I know have both parent's working to be able to some day pay for college, braces, or teen car insurance if not to afford immediate cost of a mortgage.

As the text progressed, another problem I often had was telling how old the children Elkind was discussing were. This was particularly true in the parenting chapter when debunking group sports. I had come into this text expecting that hurrying by definition dealt with just children before school age. So, it was confusing for me at times. While I am not a huge fan of group sports, I was still surprised at the amount of time of spent on this topic and some of the reasons why parents feel they must enroll their children in such programs at a young age. The most ludicrous on to me was that there are no places that are safe to take your child to play outdoors. Maybe this is true in the inner city, but can't you just accompany your children to the park? True, I live in Maine, where the city isn't the quite the same, but I know of five parks all within ten minutes driving distance. All of them places I feel safe accompanying my child during normal playing hours. Is this really so rare that many parents feel they must enroll their children in sports programs as young as three? It was ideas like these that I wasn't sure were my naivety or Elkind's attempt at thoroughness gone array to over thinking the circumstances of a few and presenting them of the many.

Elkind's tone when discussing education was also hard to swallow. He started off completely on the wrong foot with me by equating teacher unions to standardized tests and textbooks. (I'll admit to my limited experience, but my union fought for over a year to get me fair pay, which otherwise would have meant my fifth year of teaching equal in pay to a first year teacher due to a state mandated minimum salary. My union fought to end such ridiculousness to keep good teachers in my district and I just can't see that as a negative to education). I can't recall a single positive idea about public American education. Instead, his comments were generalizations about all teachers and schools. I consistently found myself offended thinking, "I didn't do / feel that as a teacher." He particularly criticized two current education fads that I'm against: Over testing and moving curriculum to lower and lower elementary grades. In fact, it was my belief that Elkind and I would agree on many points such as these that inspired me to read his book. A list of bad practices made by teachers that increase stress included the ineffective class size for real learning, activities interrupted constantly claiming that teachers rarely do one thing for longer than two minutes, distractions such as behavior management and transitioning eat up all instructional time, and teachers ignore the majority of students labeling them early on as failures. He claims that school forces children into the same situation as a repetitious, boring, and meaningless job. One of the most insulting comments to me was "but soon the endless demands for learning in a non-supportive environment and the competition force the young person to call upon energy reserves that are no always replenished." He at least finished the chapter by saying that from what we've learned about stress in general, teachers under pressure to improve test scores can become egocentric and unappreciative of other people's needs, thus making it an unfavorable position for teaching. At least he gave teachers some slack for being human.

Even though I genearally was annoyed by his negative tone about American public education, he did have

several interesting points. I did agree with some of his ideas on rotation and retention for early grades. I was glad that Elkind recognized that learning requires a certain amount of stress. Too often people forget that learning must be stressful or even painful. Many times, Elkind mentions "developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs," but he never defines one clearly. He states it is not hurrying if your child is enrolled in one of these, but doesn't clearly give parents guidelines on how to identify one. One thing interesting was his discussion of how students fear, and are thus stressed by, other students in their schools that they perceive as dangerous. One way off base comment in my mind was the idea that it is not beneficial for teachers in the early grades to be specialists in reading and math. Aren't these the early years when you want your child's teacher to be most knowledgeable to start reading and math off well? I thought it interesting that he mentions the physical symptoms of students always facing failure, but not those of children overwhelmed by parental (and peer) pressure to constantly preform.

Meanwhile, most of Elkind's points about inappropriate media, be it TV, print, movies, or music, really came down to parents monitoring what their children watch. Why would you let a child watch Roseanne or NYPD Blue? Seriously, that isn't the media; that's poor parenting. True, we don't watch many commercials these days, but I don't see kid's advertising during adult shows. Adult shows are marketed towards adults, and to allow a young child to watch one is the parent's fault. One point I agreed with was that children characters on TV are often unrealistic, which is why I think they are so often off screen. Given his seemingly straitlaced opinions, I found it funny that he defended raunchy MAD magazine, yet was rough on girl magazines. He was also rough on the low quality sci fi and romance series. In fact, he pretty much states that girl books are more shallow than boy books, saying that books like Lord of the Flies and A Separate Peace have become classics. One point I found particularly sobering was a quotation from Walter Dean Meyers stating that only 1 in a 100 children's books focus on the black experience. But, Elkind's discussion of music in general seemed dated and off base. He states that all rock is too sexual, but doesn't even mention rap music. In fact, Tiffany was one of his artist examples. The pressure of peers to listen to the right music is one of his points, but this seemed to contradict his ideas later about how important peer relationships are. In general, I think music is an escape for teens, as he mentions, but doesn't focus on.

The chapter on lapware, brain research and the internet seemed to put unrelated topics together, and he wasn't clear on how the internet in particular caused hurrying or related to the other two topics. I expected to agree with most of Elkind's thoughts on lapware, which was one of the reasons I was interested in this book in the first place. These types of programs did not sound very helpful and did seem to just prey on vulnerable parents who want the best for their children. I believe that a little computer exposure is fine for a baby or toddler. For Natalie, we've read books on line a few times and watched videos, but most of her time with the computer now that she is a toddler is imitating what we do - typing, clicking the mouse, and such. I see no issue with allowing a toddler to use a computer to view media you would otherwise see in print or on TV or in imitative play. I really agreed with the point that young children learn best through real objects and people, thus debunking the whole idea of using lapware (or videos) with babies and toddlers. Furthermore, he gives very interesting research about at what ages children acquire the ability to differentiate letters and phonic sounds, all of which is after two, which is far older than the children for whom these products are made.

I also disliked Elkind's tendency to jump to the worse case scenario. Here are a few examples:

Divorced parents asking their young children who they love more.

When young adults have inconsistent or discrepant information to help them form their personal identity, they can adopt a negative role, like a criminal or prostitute. Or they may loose their identity in a cult or religious organization.

Discussing that a larger number of children are kidnapped by noncustodial parent and gives a detailed

example in section on free floating anxiety caused by separation.

Examples of Lilit Gampel and Christian Kriens who were children prodigies in music who respectively fell of the music map and committed suicide.

Instead of discussing the trouble the average hurried child might encounter, he spends time on these extreme examples. I felt discussing hurrying in these terms was like scare tactics.

Several pet peeves of mine about non-fiction texts Elkind commits. First, the formatting is inconsistent in places. There are headings that are italicized in some places, but not in others. It also appeared at least twice that their were inaccuracies in the text. Colette Dowling's book is entitled The Cinderella Complex, not syndrome. And he refers to a band as Destiny's Girls, which I'm pretty sure should be Destiny's Child. I felt that in a third edition, such issues should be ironed out, not created. Furthermore, Elkind block quotes long sections of text from other authors frequently. I would accept that in my freshmen research papers, so I don't respect it much in a professional's writing. I'd say at least half of these long quotations could have been summarized or paraphrased without hurting validity or creditability of the source.

That's not to say that I didn't enjoy anything about this text. I did agree with many of Elkind's ideas about standardized testing. In particular, I agreed with his point that over testing or overemphasis on scores causes us to stop focusing on actual learning. He continues on to say that we focus too much on grades, de-emphasizing what the grade truly means about learning, which I also agree with. I also enjoyed his point about how parents hurry their children by pushing them into gifted and talented programs (or, I believe, even honors programs) when they are not right for them. I found some of the information about how humans deal with stress interesting as well as the review of Piaget's ideas about development. But, neither of these topics were why I read this book. I found a few points in the book enlightening. One that particularly sticks with me was about play. I agreed with the author that play is how young children learn and also how they work through emotions and social constructs. He mentions how adults interrupt play with educational questions because we don't realize which type of play is occurring. We see teachable moments and try to seize them, but sometimes a child just needs to play. I also found some of the information about hurrying true for students I've had in the past. Elkind discusses that when children hit adolescence, they tend start to realize the hurrying they were put through as children, and that this can result in all sorts of problems. I've seen many students who are very bright shut down academically, quite possibly in rebellion to parental pushing earlier in school. I've also seen students reacting poorly to the stress of hurrying, some of them struggling to attain perfection while not fully understanding the purpose reaching their goals.

Here are some other interesting points from throughout the text:

"In sum, needing to support children financially and emotionally, without herself enjoying those kinds of support, is perhaps the most severe stress encountered by a female in our society."

"Our problems in American education arise because we are not sufficiently American, not because we are insufficiently British or Japanese. Our classrooms are not as individualized, and our curriculums are not as flexible, as our values of individualism and self-reliance demand. True educational reform will only come about when we make our education truly democratic, appropriate to children's individual growth rates and levels of mental development."

"Cognitive conceit," which is what causes kids to think they know everything. He actually says this is why kids favor stories that "put adults in a derogatory or stupid role," which explains all those Nickelodeon shows my brother and sister-in-law hate.

A child needs to be in formal operation period to understand grammar, algebra, metaphor and meta-cognition. All too complex to teach directly before about age 11.

Children learn about social contracts more through friendship, which are mutual, rather than unilateral

relationships with parents. This is seen through learning rules to games as well as being on a team. The low class child is hurried by working parents because of material need, while the middle class two working parent child is hurried by the parents' emotional needs.

Adriane Devries says

David Elkind, Ph. D., describes the Hurried Child as one who is forced to grow up too fast too soon. In American society, which highly values competition and “the earlier the better” mentality, the condition is pandemic, caused by the chronic exploitation of children’s talents and time for purposes other than their direct benefit, by a combination of pressures from parents, commercial media, and school.

Though much Hurrying can be defended as an earnest effort by parents to ensure a good future for a child—good grades to get into college, sports achievement to win a scholarship, etc.—symptoms of rebellion, learning difficulties, burnout, neuroses, and poor self-image and interpersonal relationships indicate that a “contractual” relational boundary has been crossed. When children feel treated as an object to be controlled, rather than as human with feelings, dignity and a right to opinion, they translate this as rejection by those who have the most power to hurt or nurture them. Especially once they reach adolescence and can articulate these feelings of manipulation, they may retaliate by underperforming or lashing out. Causes of parental hurrying include adults' insecurities, dual-income schedules, and divorces that sap children's time and loyalties.

Modern schooling further hurries children by classifying them all into conformist, academic roles for the purpose of grade-getting, teacher job retention and school funding. Kids know they are pawns in a system that only cares for what they can produce. Unmanageable class size, with limited ability to protect students from violence in unsupervised settings or to teach them according to learning styles or aptitudes, long school days with few tangible rewards, as well as constant interruptions and distractions, create increasingly higher hoops children must jump through in order to appease those in authority over them.

In addition, visual media (versus books that can be put down in order to process content) deluge children with an overwhelming amount of images and concepts that they are developmentally too immature to process. As a result, children suffer information overload, fears and gross factual misunderstanding.

The harmful effects of Hurrying can be mitigated by thoughtful teachers and parents. Treating children with respect and manners rather than barking commands; limiting, monitoring, and discussing media for content; adjust class sizes and content to reward individual styles of learning and aptitudes; and inclusion of open-ended play without sneaky learning agendas, as well as ample opportunities for healthy self-expression in arts and music, especially when these do not reflect a parent's ideal image.

Hurrying is basically undue stress for children, and the effects are often the opposite of the intended purposes of childhood activity. Relieving these symptoms creates happier, more engaged kids who can learn for the pure joy of learning and pursue their own life's calling at their God-given pace.

Aayaam says

Gave up on this because it was a bit vivid for my taste. If you can deal with a work that hits close to home, I recommend it to you.

UPDATE: Continuing it after newfound motivation.

Solady Batterjee says

I can't say that I am with or against the ideas of this book, the thing that I would like to share is that I believe that parents should have an inner scale to when and how much they encourage their children and when to stop.
