



Parenting Without Borders: Surprising Lessons Parents Around the World Can Teach Us

By Christine Gross-Loh Ph.D

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An eye-opening guide to the world's best parenting strategies

Research reveals that American kids lag behind in academic achievement, happiness, and wellness. Christine Gross-Loh exposes culturally determined norms we have about “good parenting,” and asks, Are there parenting strategies other countries are getting right that we are not? This book takes us across the globe and examines how parents successfully foster resilience, creativity, independence, and academic excellence in their children. Illuminating the surprising ways in which culture shapes our parenting practices, Gross-Loh offers objective, research-based insight such as:

- Co-sleeping may promote independence in kids.
- “Hoverparenting” can damage a child’s resilience.
- Finnish children, who rank among the highest academic achievers, enjoy multiple recesses a day.
- Our obsession with self-esteem may limit a child’s potential.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In this beautifully written book, Christine Gross-Loh provokes American parents to see how we might do better, often with less intensity, to reach our own goals."

—Robert A. Levine, Emeritus Professor of Education and Human Development, Harvard Graduate School of Education

"Through insightful research and a refreshingly skeptical approach, parenting expert Gross-Loh peers through a global lens to uncover innovative ways to raise children in contemporary America."

—*Worth* magazine

"In this valuable book, Christine Gross-Loh asks us to broaden our view of what constitutes good parenting; she challenges us to go beyond the limitations of our borders. This is an overdue approach to the future of the American family, demanding both intellect and humility."

—Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*

"Bracingly honest, straightforward, and thought-provoking."

—*The Boston Globe*

"You may not agree with each point Christine Gross-Loh makes, but there's much food for thought here."

—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

"Smart, well-researched, accessible, and fun."

—*The Huffington Post*

Praise for *Parenting Without Borders*

"Every now and then I read a book that changes the way I think. Christine Gross-Loh's *Parenting Without Borders* is one of those books. This will be the only book I buy for new parents...The observations are interesting and important for parents of children at every age."

—Rachel Rose, *Brain, Child* magazine

"In this beautifully written book, Christine Gross-Loh provokes American parents to see how we might do better, often with less intensity, to reach our own goals."

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—*Worth Magazine*

"An intriguing look at parenting paradigms"

—*Kirkus*

"You don't have to move to Finland—even though your son would learn how to sew his own bathing suit and duffel bag in school—but you do want to read this book. *Parenting Without Borders* takes the reader on an eye-opening, fascinating, and vital tour of time-tested and effective parenting practices, with great armchair traveling thrown in for free."

—Wendy Mogel, author of *The Blessings of a B Minus* and *The Blessings of a Skinned Knee*

"Our hovering/helping/worrying way of parenting feels so "instinctual" that it is astounding—and freeing!—to read how odd it appears to other cultures. Better still, this lovely book brims with examples of things parents in other countries do differently that could make our lives (and our kids') so much nicer. Love it!"

—Lenore Skenazy, founder of the book and blog *Free-Range Kids*

"In this valuable book, Christine Gross-Loh asks us to broaden our view of what constitutes good parenting; she challenges us to go beyond the limitations of our borders. This is an overdue approach to the future of the American family, demanding both intellect and humility."

—Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*

"The dilemmas facing loving parents regarding how best to raise their kids can be vexing and entrapping. Christine's book offers clear and effective release for parents from their anxieties by revealing a rich landscape of effective multicultural parenting practices experiences. A balanced, factual, fresh book."

—Stuart Brown, M.D., author of *Play* and founder of the National Institute of Play

"Young American parents including myself are plagued with the feeling of making it up as they go along. Cultures around the world contain so much wisdom on parenting—and it's far past time that we harvested the best of it. Christine Gross-Loh couldn't be a better guide to lead us on a grand world tour of parenting styles and practices."

—Ethan Watters, author of *Crazy Like Us*

"Christine Gross-Loh offers a global perspective on parenting that's practical, reasoned, and fascinating. *Parenting Without Borders* helps all parents take-away greater compassion, simplicity, confidence, joy and balance by sharing best practices of parents around the world. A must-read for these globally-connected times."

—Homa S. Tavangar, author of *Growing up Global*

"This book should be required reading for any parent or anyone thinking of becoming one."

—Marianne LaFrance, Professor of Psychology and Professor of Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies at Yale University and author of *Why Smile?*

"This even-handed, fascinating, well-researched book takes the reader on a journey to so many different cultures and countries. On every page I learned something to make me both a better parent and a more thoughtful educator."

—Jennifer Margulis, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, Brandeis University and author of *The Business of Baby*

"What an eye-opening tour through parenting practices the world round! Gross-Loh brings balance and perspective to complex issues, with wonderful results. Her lucid and balanced book will help parents see their practices anew, and ground their everyday decisions in something very like wisdom."

—Gish Jen, author of *Tiger Writing*

“An intriguing look at parenting paradigms in countries where children are deemed to be the best adjusted...Gross-Loh’s patient, grounded explication and engaging personal anecdotes make this a much more positive, culturally expansive contribution to the discussion than most parenting books.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

About the Author

Christine Gross-Loh is a journalist and author. Her writing has appeared in publications including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, and the *Guardian*. She has a PhD from Harvard University in East Asian history.

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INTRODUCTION

We all want the best for our children, but what does that mean? Robert LeVine, an eminent Harvard anthropologist, determined that parents around the world universally share three goals in raising their children. The first goal is survival and health: Parents want their children to stay alive. For those who live in societies where they can be reasonably sure of being able to meet children’s most basic survival needs past infancy, though, the second universal goal is to raise children who will have the basic skills they’ll need to sustain themselves economically once they grow up. And finally, there’s the goal of self-maximization—of raising a socially competent child who possesses the cultural values that are considered important, and who will succeed in that society: *a child who will thrive*.

I didn’t know if I would ever have a child. Pregnancy didn’t come easily to me, and my husband, David, and I experienced the heartache of infertility before conceiving our first baby. But I always loved children and longed for the day I might become a mother. When I finally became pregnant, survival was a question: I hemorrhaged so severely in my seventh month that doctors told us the pregnancy was in danger. It wasn’t until tiny Benjamin was born and safely in my arms, when I looked at his face with his wide brown eyes, mop of black hair, and the puzzled expression that elicited such fierce protectiveness inside me, that I started to think about what kind of parent I would be and how I could best raise a child who would not only survive but also thrive.

My parents immigrated to the United States from South Korea shortly before I was born in 1968. Growing up in the 1970s in small-town Pennsylvania, I straddled two cultures every day of my childhood. In some ways my parents were very Korean in how they raised us: We used chopsticks at the dinner table; kimchi, seaweed, and rice were staples in our home; I was taught not to call adults by their first names and to behave respectfully toward older relatives. Education was highly valued in our house and we were expected to complete our homework on time and get good grades. Sometimes this felt like a lot of pressure. At the same time, my parents had a broad perspective and were enthusiastic and relaxed about the things my brothers and I wanted to do, whether it was make our own Halloween costumes, pretend to pan for gold in a creek, watch movies for hours with our friends, or eat or read whatever we wanted. When I look back on my childhood, I am actually astounded by how little my parents questioned the things we were doing with our time and where our lives were going, especially since our American small-town childhood was so different from their own.

They had their worries, as many immigrant families who strongly want their children to thrive in their new society often do. I remember hushed conversations between my mom and dad about whether we were really getting a good education, and get-togethers with other Korean immigrant families where parents exchanged questions about the schools their children were attending as they tried to navigate an alien school system.

Sometimes our differences really compounded my self-consciousness about being one of the few Asian-American students in school. But like many American parents of my generation, I find myself looking back with amazement at a degree of freedom and acceptance that seems virtually lost today. Even though my parents always conveyed the value of holding high expectations, they gave us so much time and space to experiment, play, and just be. They were always trying to do their best for us. They believed in our potential to flourish. But they weren't always trying to mold and change us.

During my twenties I lived in Japan several times, first to study Japanese and then to do research for a doctorate in East Asian history. In a remote village nestled in the mountainous countryside, I met David, who, like me, was a student who had come to Japan to learn the language. When David and I returned to the United States and decided to get married, we also knew that we might eventually be going back to Japan one day and maybe even raising children there. No matter where our children would grow up, though, I knew I loved America. And I knew there were many things from my own Korean-American upbringing and my Jewish-American husband's that would shape our family's life.

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