

Toxic Childhoods

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Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.

Plato

On a recent trip to Belfast, we picked up a new book by British educational consultant, Sue Palmer, **Toxic Childhood: How the Modern World is Damaging Our Children and What We Can Do About It** (Orion Publishing Company; www.orionbooks.co.uk). Palmer observes, "We live in an age of comfort, convenience, and promise — a wonderful place for grown-up human beings to work and relax. But it's not always the best of all possible worlds for children. Deep in our hearts we all know it, but we're frightened to admit it. The world we've created is damaging our children's brains."

Palmer goes on to list the factors that affect children's development that have undergone considerable changes in recent decades:

- the food children eat
- the amount of exercise, activity, and unstructured play they engage in
- the amount of time spent outdoors, especially in natural settings
- the length and regularity of sleep
- the security and stability of lifestyle
- the potential for attachment in the first 18 months
- the amount that adults talk to them and the way they talk
- the level of first-hand experiences they have throughout childhood
- the consistency of child care arrangements

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- the degree to which they're helped to be self-regulating
- the role models available to them
- the level of emotional security and stability throughout childhood
- the time available for social interactions with family
- the ethos of the preschools and schools they attend
- the confidence of parents in all aspects of child rearing

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