

Book Review

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Love in Love Out: A Compassionate Approach to Parenting Your Anxious Child. Edited by Dr Malie Coyne (292 pp.; ISBN: 978-0-0083-3299-0) Harper Collins: London, UK. 2020

It is widely accepted that there are increased levels of anxiety amongst young people today and parents often report feeling powerless to manage this. Dr Malie Coyne, Clinical Psychologist and parent herself is well placed to provide what she terms ‘a compassionate approach to parenting your anxious child’.

The title ‘Love in, Love Out’ is a mantra and tool repeated throughout the book to help reinforce her strong message to parents of the importance of caring for themselves in order to better manage their children’s emotions.

Dr Coyne is keen to convey herself as a struggling parent, which endears the reader and makes the book read more like advice from a friend as opposed to cold factual or impractical suggestions from an authoritarian figure.

The author draws the reader in by asking reflective questions prior to providing insights from her research and experience. The six chapters develop on each other providing definitions and discussion around compassion and anxiety followed by the application of the use of compassion to managing yourself as a parent and managing your child’s anxiety.

A Compassion-Focused Therapy approach is used as the foundation psychological theory utilised in the book and all recommendations are linked to the three-circle approach with the consistent focus being on ‘soothing’.

Dr Coyne explains anxiety from a historical physiological basis and does not attempt to advocate a ‘cure’. We are reminded anxiety is a normal emotion unless functioning is adversely affected and discourages ‘helicopter parenting’ where children are over-protected. The equation of ‘Happiness = Expectations – Reality’ is used to place the anxiety children experience today in the context of their constant exposure to the ‘highlight’ reel from social media. Her suggestions aim to empower parents to manage the ‘controllables’ and giving them the tools to keep open the channels of communication with their children. Case studies working through common issues such as exam stress, school refusal and separation anxiety are used to illustrate her strategies in use.

The author is not afraid to share her personal experience of being a parent using phrases such as ‘Fake it

until you make it, that’s what I had to do!’ The often difficult subject of parents’ own experiences as a child and the impact of this on their parenting style is approached confidently through quotes from a parenting group on this topic. There is a consistent theme of reassurance and supportive encouragement throughout the book which I find refreshing in a world where parents are under extreme pressure to meet society’s expectations or social media’s depiction of the ‘perfect’ parent.

‘Resilience’ is the current buzzword around parenting and Dr Coyne provides a step-by-step mnemonic to guide parents which she terms the SAFE Chain of Resilience. She opens the chapter on Children with a wonderfully illustrative poem from a child describing their anxiety. Other books in this genre can often under-evaluate the emotional perspective of the child. She gives fantastic examples of how to explain and discuss anxiety with a child using animals as a metaphor or storybooks as a prompting tool.

The large amount of space within the book afforded to providing an opportunity to reflect on the learnings within the context of your own family and environment is particularly impressive. There is an appreciation of the impact of a busy environment and ‘too much stuff or too much information’ on both the parent and child’s capacity to access calm within themselves including practical tips on how to manage this.

The final chapter focuses on creating an action plan using a workbook style which also serves to summarise and reinforce learnings from the book. Dr Coyne recognises her own limitations and draws on the experience of other experts within their field of specialty in a dialogue fashion through case-based discussion covering play therapy, CBT and mindfulness therapeutic approaches.

The appendices provide the most extensive variety of tools for use across all age groups I have found within the genre to date. Another welcome inclusion is the thoroughly researched and up to date ‘Relevant Resources’ section for both parent and child of books, websites and apps to stimulate further learning even after the book is finished.

Throughout the book, more difficult theories or physiology are presented in easy-to-follow illustrations in lay terms and also accompanied by a case study example. Quotes used are relevant to a general audience including from novels, popular Buddhist leaders and parents or children themselves.

However, I did find the organisation of the book slightly haphazard in that some topics seem to be referred to several times in quite a scattered way. This may have been the author’s purposeful decision, but I feel concepts such as resilience building would have been easier to grasp had they been addressed in one section.

Overall, the book succeeds in its objective to provide parents with a 'bedside bible' containing a variety of tools and strategies to help manage a child's anxiety. The layout lends itself to either reading from beginning to the end or used to dip in and out of.

As I was reading, I found myself sending ideas to my parents' friends and family but such is the amount of valuable advice, I directed them to purchase the book for their own regular perusal. 'Love In, Love Out' may be addressed to parents of an anxious child, but the compassionate approach described is a

valuable resource to parents of all children and professionals who work in this area.

Conflict of interest

Petra McLoughlin has no conflict of interest to declare.

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