

How to Raise an Adult

1. For better or worse, eighteen is not the magical age at which a child becomes an adult; adulthood is more than just a number. So what *does* it mean to be an adult? On page 145, Lythcott-Haims offers a response to this question with the help of Professor William Damon, who states that “an adult social role is one that is intrinsically not about *you*.” Do you agree or disagree with this definition? How would you define adulthood?
2. As Lythcott-Haims discusses in her introduction, parenting styles, values, and methodologies in the United States have changed through the years and between generations. Does (or will) your parenting style differ from that of your own parents? In your lifetime, have you noticed a broader shift in the ways we, as a culture, think about and practice parenting?
3. In the twenty-first century, technology influences nearly every facet of our lives, including the ways in which we parent. On page 14, Lythcott-Haims presents the following examples of how technology has affected parent-child relationships: “Take, for example, the mother of a Beverly Hills high schooler who insisted her son text her hourly on his way to and from a beach outing with friends. . . . Or the Stanford parent who contacted the university to say he thought his daughter was missing because he hadn’t heard from her in over a day.” How does technology play a role in the way you parent (or plan to parent)? Is the ability to be in constant contact a blessing or a curse?
4. As parents, it pains us to see our kids get hurt, or fail, or face any variety of disappointment. But Lythcott-Haims argues that the experience of failure is key to building resilience in children and young adults. To what extent, and in what ways, is failure a necessary crucible for growth? At what point, if any, should parents intervene to prevent struggle?
5. Developmental psychologists generally agree that there are four types of parenting: authoritative, permissive/indulgent, neglectful, and authoritarian. These types are diagrammed on a Cartesian chart on page 146. If your parenting style were a plot point on this chart, where do you think it would fall? Has its position changed over time?
6. There are numerous examples throughout *How to Raise an Adult* of parents who become exceedingly involved in their children’s schoolwork and responsibilities—sometimes through college and even beyond, into their children’s professional career. Is it ever appropriate or acceptable for parents to assist their children with schoolwork? College applications? The job search?
7. On pages 81 to 83, Lythcott-Haims proposes a checklist of life skills that any self-sufficient eighteen-year-old should be able to exhibit. Do you agree with the contents of this list? Are there skills or behaviors that you think should be added to or removed from the list?
8. On pages 166 to 174, Lythcott-Haims describes a four-step strategy for teaching life skills: 1) first we do it *for you*, 2) then we do it *with you*, 3) then we *watch you* do it, and 4) then *you do it* completely *independently*. She acknowledges that the third and fourth steps are often the most difficult for parents to carry out, and require an enormous leap of faith. In your experience, why is it hard for parents to stand back? What are the fears and hopes involved, and how can a parent mitigate them?
9. One of the book’s major concerns is the pressure that young people feel—to get straight As and perform well in extracurricular activities, and ultimately to gain admission to top-ranked universities and to obtain job offers from well-known companies—and the harms to mental health that result from this pressure. To what extent is it possible for individual parents to encourage effort and striving, and to reward achievement, without risking their children’s mental health and without fueling the “brand name brouhaha,” as Lythcott-Haims calls it on page 248? In what ways does our current collective value system resist individual efforts to turn the tide?
10. As discussed in Part 4 of the book, over-parenting not only negatively affects our children, but often places undue strain on parents themselves. How does your parenting style affect your stress levels and your sense of self?