

"Emily and Amelia Nagoski deconstruct the stress we experience as women, and their compassionate, science-based advice on how to release it made me cry with gratitude and relief. The book is that revolutionary."
—PEGGY ORENSTEIN

burnout

the secret to
unlocking
the stress cycle

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**Moms' Group Reading Guide
to Burnout**

Introduction

Dear parents,

I'm so glad you're reading, and interested in taking care of yourself... so you can be the best parent you can, right? Because once you become a parent, that might well be your primary identity for the rest of your life. Which is a privilege and a joy, but also a loss of the identity you used to have.

We call this the “Mom’s Group” Guide because we imagine women of all kinds reflecting on the influence of burnout on their parenting. Of course, there are many kinds of moms, many kinds of parents. We think they're all amazing, all important, and all at special risk for burnout

Neither Emily nor I has given birth to a child, nor raised a child from infancy. We don't claim any expertise in parenting. Neither of us especially wanted kids, but I married a man with three amazing children. So, I've been a step-parent for twenty years to kids I've helped grow up from pre-school to college. Step-momming has changed me, changed my life, changed my understanding of what matters most in the universe. My husband's kids are the cause and focus of every major life decision of my adulthood; and my dearest hope for my life is that I can be useful to them, can help them, can make sure they are healthy and happy. And everything I learned in the process of writing this book has helped me give them more.

So I can't claim that Burnout will teach you to put on your own oxygen mask first, as the metaphor goes. If I were on a plane next to one of my step-children, and they couldn't get to their oxygen mask, you'd have to wrestle me to the ground to force me to do something for myself before

Introduction

I did it for them. But the fact is, your life is rooted in giving your time, energy, and love to other people, you can't sustain a healthy existence. You need to be cared for, too. And often, there isn't anyone making sure you get the care you need. You have to monitor that for yourself. The stuff I learned that's in this book taught me how to do that.

I hope it helps you, too! Healthy, joyful parents can smash the patriarchy, and raise a generation who are unwilling to perpetuate systems of oppression.

I know everything you imagine to be good for yourself, you'll also imagine to help your kids. Of course. But I'd like to challenge you to imagine it in your own life, too, not just for your kids. The main obstacle we're here to help parents eliminate is the expectations of the Patriarchy (ugh) of what a parent does, and who a parent is. Parenting, the expectations of the world about what a parent does and who a parent is, has changed drastically over the past fifty years. Your parents and your grandparents had very different ideas about raising kids than you've been hearing about recently. So, while your children will benefit from completing the cycle and learning the game is rigged and the bikini industrial complex; but they'll benefit even more from having a mother who can resist external pressures to conform to something that is unhealthy, who can model self-compassion, and is as ready to turn toward her own suffering with kindness and compassion as she is to turn toward theirs.

—Amelia

Introduction

A User's Guide to Burnout

“Your body, with its instinct for self-preservation, knows, on some level, that Human Giver Syndrome is slowly killing you. That’s why you keep trying mindfulness and green smoothies and self-care trend after self-care trend. But that instinct for self-preservation is battling a syndrome that insists that self-preservation is selfish, so your efforts to care for yourself might actually make things worse, activating even more punishment from the world or from yourself, because how dare you?”

- When did you last feel emotionally exhausted? What did it feel like?
- Do you feel morally obliged to give everything you have? Does your obligation to your kids feel different from obligation to anyone else?
- How would your life be different if your kids become Beings or Givers? How would theirs be different – what kind of parents would they become? What kind of spouses?
- Who are the givers in your life?
- What is your “cheese”? That is, where would like to end up, after reading this book?

Part 1: Only What You Take With You

CHAPTER 1

Complete the Cycle

“To be “well” is not to live in a state of perpetual safety and calm, but to move fluidly from a state of adversity, risk, adventure, or excitement, back to safety and calm, and out again. Stress is not bad for you; being stuck is bad for you.”

- What strategies help you “complete the cycle”? Are there some that work sometimes and others that work other times? What does it feel like to “complete the cycle”?
- As a parent, how often can you let yourself feel your feelings, and how much are you required to repress?
- Have you experienced “the Feels” or watched someone else experience them? What was it like?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 1: Only What You Take With You

CHAPTER 2

#Persist

“But a lot of the time, knowing when to give up comes to us not from rational, explicit cost-benefit analysis; it comes to us the same way it comes to the bird and the squirrel—in a quiet intuition that is outside rationality. We simply hear the voice inside us saying, ‘You’ve done all you can here. It’s time to move on.’”

“Humans—especially women—have an extraordinary capacity to ignore this voice.”

~

“The quality of our lives is not measured by the amount of time we spend in a state of perfection. [...]. The quality of our lives, day to day, is measured by our freedom to choose to stay or leave. That freedom comes when we have abundance enough and safety enough to let go of what is broken and reach for something new.”

- What are some aspects of parenting that can lead you to feel “foopy,” oscillating between frustrated rage and helpless despair?
- Often what parents need is not more “grit” or motivation or “persistence,” but more help. Can you think of a time when, rather than persisting at something, you reached out for help? What made that situation different? What resources are available to you? How can you find more?
- Amelia immediately wanted to share the **Redefine Winning Worksheet** with her kids, but parents will benefit from it, too! How do you work out a goal that was soon, certain, positive, concrete, specific, and personal?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 1: Only What You Take With You

CHAPTER 3 Meaning

“But no matter what forces oppose you, whether it’s Human Giver Syndrome or natural disasters or personal loss, nothing can stand between you and your Something Larger.”

“Your Something Larger lives inside you.”

- Many parents count their kids as their Something Larger. How true is that for you? How much does it help? Does it ever feel like a burden?
- Besides parenting, what makes you feel connected to Something Larger?
- How is being a parent now different from what your parents and grandparents had to do? What is the relationship between what you value in parenting and what the world seems to expect from parents today?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 2: The Real Enemy

CHAPTER 4 The Game Is Rigged

“Seeing the rigged game isn’t a neutral experience; you’ll probably feel some feelings about it as you go through the world spotting the ways the game is rigged and the ways the world is lying to you about the ways the game is rigged.”

- This is one of the most tempting subjects to consider about your kids – of course! You’ll definitely want to consider that LATER. I’d like to challenge you to consider your own experience first.
- What adversities have shaped the way you grew? What are the “headwinds” you’ve faced?
- Now the harder question: What tailwinds have you had at your back, facilitating your growth toward the sun?
- What shape tree are you? Did you grow up on a cliff or in a forest or in an open field?
- Where are your kids growing up – on an open field or a cliff? What’s the relationship between where you grew and where your children are growing?
- When you filled out the Smashin’ Some Patriarchy Worksheet, what did it feel like to consider the ways you’re making the world better just by doing what matters to you?
- What was an important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 2: The Real Enemy

CHAPTER 5

The Bikini Industrial Complex

“Many of us have grown into world-class ignorers of our own needs, just as we were taught to be. We don’t even notice that we’re ignoring our needs. Our bodies are sending us all kinds of signals, but we live from the neck up, only attending to the noise in our heads and shutting out the noise coming from the other 95 percent of our internal experience.”

- What did it feel like, to read about the science that says weight doesn’t have the relationship to health that the Bikini Industrial Complex insists it has? Do you believe it? What would you lose, if it’s true?
- Learning to love your body doesn’t mean the rest of the world will do the same. How might you practice living with the tension between loving your body and living in a world that still punishes women for the shape of their bodies?
- Your kids are neck deep in the B.I.C. Does anything you teach them help them escape it? Do you teach media literacy? Critical thinking? Nonjudgement? Do you talk about infrastructure? Systemic oppression? Do you teach them to be kind to their neighbors no matter what they look like?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 3: Wax On, Wax Off

CHAPTER 6

Connect

“We need both connection and autonomy. That’s not a contradiction. Humans are built to oscillate from connection to autonomy and back again.”

- Who are the most important people in your Bubble of Love?
- Which style of “knowing” characterizes you best, connected knowing or separate knowing? If you have a partner, which style characterizes them?
- With whom, or in what contexts, can you be fully authentic? What benefits are there to being able to put on a social “mask”? What are the costs?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 3: Wax On, Wax Off

CHAPTER 7

What Makes You Stronger

“Sometimes we mistake our guilt about resting for our passionate commitment to the people and ideas we cherish most. But in reality, the status quo thrives in a context where people who want to change the world believe that sleep is a sign of weakness and that rest is the enemy.”

- Are comfortable are you with daydreaming and being entertained by your own thoughts? Do you find yourself getting impatient or needing distraction? What low-demand activities may facilitate your ability to daydream?
- How easily distracted are your students? How much opportunity do they have for rest during the day? If you give them a break, is it hard to get their attention back? How much practice does it take to get comfortable oscillating between rest and effort?
- When you fill out the 24/7 Worksheet, what did you notice? Were there places you could insert more rest?
- How much sleep do you need? How much do you get? What obstacles – external and internal – stand between you and more sleep?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 3: Wax On, Wax Off

CHAPTER 8 Grow Mighty

“Again and again, women describe their madwoman as an uncomfortable, even unpleasant person ... and they describe her fragility, vulnerability, or sadness. This uncomfortable, fragile part of ourselves serves a very important function.”

- What is your “madwoman” like, and how would you describe your relationship with her?
- When you did the **Madwoman Worksheet**, could you find the vulnerability behind the critical, mean voice? What was it like to try to befriend, rather than silence, your inner critic?
- Have you ever felt your madwoman take over in a situation where you felt something was being expected of you that was unfair? Or when you fell short of your own expectations for yourself? If you go back to that moment and ask your madwoman what she was feeling in that moment, what would she tell you?
- Imagine that your practice of self-compassion – that is, compassion for the madwoman – helped you heal and grow mighty. What would you do with that strength? How do you feel about that possibility?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Conclusion

Joyfully Ever After

“To need help feeling “enough” is not a pathology; it is not “neediness.” It’s as normal as your need to assure the people you love that they can trust themselves, that they can be as tender and compassionate with themselves as you would be with them. And this exchange, this connection, is the springboard from which we launch into a joyful life.”

- What does it feel like, when you connect with other “givers” and give them the gift of, “You are enough”? What does it feel like to receive that gift?
- What was one *really* important idea in this book, an idea you’ll take away and use in your life?