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By [Laura Clark](#)

Why we should put ourselves before children:

Want happy children?

**Spend less time trying to be perfect parents
and prioritise own relationship instead, says book:**

Couples who want to raise happy and successful children should spend less time striving to be perfect parents - and instead try to be perfect spouses.

Family therapist David Code has claimed that children become demanding and dissatisfied if parents obsess over all aspects of their lives.

He argues that the 'greatest gift' you can give a child is to set them an example with a healthy, happy marriage.



Kirsty Young with her husband Nick Jones: Young said 'cult' of pushy parenting 'sickened' her because it was 'the real modern disease'

The ideas in his book *To Raise Happy Kids Put Your Marriage First*, are the latest salvo in a fiery debate over child-rearing.

The TV and radio presenter Kirsty Young recently said the 'cult' of pushy parenting 'sickened' her and was the 'modern disease'.

Meanwhile psychologist Dr Madeline Levine criticised 'helicopter' parenting - where parents 'hover' over their children's every move - for contributing to depression and anxiety.

Their conclusions appear to be reinforced by the U.S. therapist's book, which says children suffer from having too much attention.

'Today's number one myth about parenting is that the more attention we give our kids, the better they'll turn out,' said Mr Code, who also writes for the *Wall Street Journal*.

'But we parents have gone too far: our overfocus on our children is doing them more harm than good.'



Devoted parents do not necessarily produce happy children, Mr Code argues in the book *To Raise Happy Kids, Put Your Marriage First* (posed by model)

'Families centred on children create anxious, exhausted parents and demanding, entitled children. We parents today are too quick to sacrifice our lives and our marriages for our kids.'

He added: 'A good marriage sets a great example for your children's future relationships, and that's win-win for the whole family.'

'By killing ourselves to provide a perfect, trauma-free childhood for our children, we're wasting our energy.'

'The greatest gift you can give your children is to have a fulfilling marriage yourself.' Mr Code said parents make two main mistakes when they put their children first.

'First, it becomes harder to respect and enforce the boundaries that shape a child's character, so he simply badgers his parents until he gets his way.'

A 'BAD' MOTHER - AND PROUD

WRITER Ayelet Waldman provoked a furious backlash after admitting in a personal essay that she loved her husband more than her four children.

She told how her offspring were not the centre of her universe and, unlike many mothers she knew, she continued to enjoy a passionate sex life.

In provocative remarks, the best-selling novelist (pictured) declared: 'If a good mother is one who loves her child more than anyone else in the world, I am not a good mother.'

'I am in fact that most abominable thing - a bad mother. I love my husband more than I love my children.'

The essay, titled *Motherlove*, unleashed such opprobrium Miss Waldman had to defend herself on Oprah Winfrey's sofa.

Her husband, Michael Chabon, 46, himself a renowned author, spoke out to condemn the 'slagosphere' of online commentators who had criticised her.

But now Miss

Waldman, 45, a former criminal defence lawyer who was in the same class as Barack Obama at Harvard, can claim a vindication of sorts.

In her 2005 essay, she wrote: 'It would be wonderful if some learned sociologist published a definitive study that established, once and for all, that children in marriages in which the parents are desperately, ardently in love are more successful, happier, live longer and healthier lives than children whose mothers focus their desires and passions on them.'

She said it was likely such a work would 'not be forthcoming'. But family therapist David Code seems to agree with her.

Miss Waldman, who lives in the U.S. with Chabon and children Sophie, Zeke, Ida-Rose and Abraham, recently published *Bad Mother, A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities and Occasional Moments of Grace*.



Bad Mother and proud

'Future bosses and spouses may not be so patient with this behaviour. Second, we put tremendous pressure on our children to fulfill our emotional needs, which may lead to the child acting out.'

'What had been a molehill becomes a mountain, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy that can cripple the child's development.'

'This draws even more attention to the problem, as parents seek a diagnosis and physicians increasingly rely on medicating children.' But parents who admit they put their marriages first risk public censure.

Author Ayelet Waldman triggered fury after admitting in 2005 she loved her husband more than her children.

Miss Young made her comments in the Radio Times ahead of her BBC TV series The British Family. She said: 'I think people these days are preoccupied with children as an extension of their own success.'

'So we try to funnel them into all these areas of achievement: the Chinese lessons or the Kumon maths - the whole Baby Einstein thing.'

'I think that's the real modern disease.'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1249176/Want-happy-children-Spend-time-trying-perfect-parents-prioritise-relationship-instead-says-book.html#ixzz0f87pPycy>