Raising Resilience

ALSO BY TOVAH P. KLEIN

How Toddlers Thrive

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How to Help Our Children Thrive in Times of Uncertainty

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with Billie Fitzpatrick

Foreword by Amy Schumer

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The names and identifying details of various individuals named in this book have been changed to protect their privacy

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To my parents, Robert and Nancy. I am who I am because of you

To Kenny. Who walks alongside me

Contents

Foreword by Amy Schumer

Our son, Gene, was born on a rainy Sunday in May. We brought him home, put him in his crib in his thoughtfully decorated, pink room (because I promised myself not to conform to gender roles), and let out a long exhale. Not wanting to leave his side, I immediately sat in the gliding chair I had ordered and began to rock as I fed him. Looking down at his tiny head, I took a deep breath and realized that I had done it. All the agony I had endured in my pregnancy—the endless vomiting, the dehydration (I had hyperemesis gravidarum), and the anxious waiting—was now, finally, behind me. Or was it? Parenting is nothing if not one foot in front of the other, a daily battle with one's fear of something happening to this most precious being and an absolute compulsion to protect them at all costs.

So when my husband, Chris, and I gave our son his first sponge bath and wound up soaking wet, head to toe, we laughed in relief and exhaustion and faced a searing question: Were we really up to this gigantic task of parenting? And when did that word become a verb, anyway? But like so many parents before us, we were in it . . . for good.

As the days and night passed, the lack of sleep driving Chris and me both a little bat-shit crazy, I turned to something that I have learned doing stand-up: my belief that getting up on stage always

presents the possibility of failing, which sadly is the only way to get stronger and better.

Two years later, with COVID upon us, threatening us inside and out, Chris and I marched up to the Barnard Toddler Center and met Tovah Klein, the director extraordinaire. Good friends had sung Tovah's praises, and like many other ambitious parents on the Upper West Side, we wanted in. More to the point, we wanted our darling son to become part of an exceptional early childhood program where he would learn not only some early school skills but also, and perhaps more importantly, the social and emotional competencies for being a loving, empathetic, and decent human being.

With Chris and me both clutching Gene's tiny hands, Tovah Klein smiled and said, confidently and calmly, "Hello!" Something about her eye contact and her manner let us know we were *all* going to be okay. And, just like that, and in spite of COVID raging, Gene was thriving at the Toddler Center: He learned to have fun, fumble, and fail. He learned to be part of a group, partner up, and listen to his own inner drummer. He played with blocks and logs; he sang out of tune; and over the next two years, we watched our little boy become a marvelous if imperfect being. Tovah said this was all about helping children become resilient.

Tovah became our fearless guide through the next year and still is to this day. Her love for children and deep knowledge of what children need to thrive is apparent in all she does and how she interacts with children. Yes, she guides young children as they build resilience from their very earliest days. But, in addition, Tovah teaches us parents, too. Her patience and empathy helped us get through the fear-wracking hell that living through COVID entailed. Tovah helped us separate from our son so he could be his own person, knowing we were nearby. She also taught us how to believe in ourselves, trust our instincts, and learn to support our child—not with rules, formulas,

or checklists but by helping us discover what we know best: how to love our child in a way that enables him to grow and thrive.

Our baby boy is on his way to kindergarten, and when it comes time to let go of his now-bigger hands next September, we, his parents, may be bubbling with nerves, but I know he will be ready to roll.

Let Tovah be your guide as she's been ours and thousands of parents' before. I thought the Toddler Center was a school for two-year-olds, but I learned it was a school for us parents. Her researched knowledge and attention armed us to be the kind of confident leaders we needed to be for our son and for ourselves. She is a gift to us and future generations of leaders and, more importantly, is good people. I am so thrilled we, as parents, get to read this book. Her first, *How Toddlers Thrive*, served as gospel in our house. And the result is a happy, independent, empathetic child who knows how to socialize and be a loved member of a community, and parents who do the same. I will never stop being grateful to you, Tovah, and to Jess Seinfeld, for recommending we bring our son and ourselves into your world. Thank you, friend.

Amy Schumer

Introduction

I've been thinking about the themes of this book for a long time, but only began writing about them as the world shut down in response to a global pandemic. My subject—raising children who can handle, get through, and thrive during and after times of uncertainty—soon became more pressing and immediate. The pandemic provided a one-of-a-kind living laboratory where I could simultaneously observe and experience my approach to parenting in an extended experiment as I watched parents and children encounter circumstances that often made them feel powerless and vulnerable. My family and I, living in New York City, were participants in this unfolding experiment as well.

While the pandemic-induced lockdown was a situation new to nearly all of us, aspects of it were also familiar to me and the work that I do. As a child psychologist, I've specialized in the effects of traumatic situations on children and families, investigating the impact of abuse, homelessness, natural disasters, and tragic events such as 9/11. I knew from my previous and ongoing research that children and adults had the capacity to emerge changed but not scarred from tragedy—if certain factors were in place. Specifically, when parents stay connected and attuned and provide children with emotional safety and security, they create a protective effect against lasting harm, even in the toughest situations.

My earlier work pointed to this protective potential, but as we all began to resettle into life postpandemic, I wanted to look deeper into

what parents were doing so effectively to create such long-lasting, positive outcomes for their children. It had to do with helping their children become resilient, but how? What else was happening within the parent-child relationship that was not only protective but also fortifying?

Answering these questions has resulted in this book, which offers parents a strategic approach to helping their children become resilient now and into the future. Resilience is not simply an ability to bounce back after disappointments or loss; it's not just the ability to adapt to changes big and small. In my thirty-plus years of working with children and their parents, as well as conducting original research and population-wide studies, I have come to understand resilience with more nuance and see it as a set of characteristics that parents can teach their children, nurturing it through their everyday interactions. Often, when we use the term "resilience," we assume that we become resilient as simply a result of making it through a difficult time, facing adversities or surviving a trauma or some other challenging event. And while overcoming hardship can strengthen a person and *show* their resilience, it does not have to take hardship or tragedy to *build* resilience.

As we all emerged from our pandemic haze, I theorized two core facets of resilience: one, that the parent-child relationship itself was some kind of resilience incubator that enabled children to develop the inner resources to adapt and adjust well; and two, that through this relationship, parents could help children build resilience proactively before the arrival of a crisis or traumatic experience. Exciting recent neurobiological research into trauma supports this view: the presence of a connected, tuned-in, loving parent makes the difference between a child being negatively (and sometimes permanently) scarred by adverse experiences versus not; evidence also shows that the presence of a connected parent helps children lay down the foundation for self-regulation—which is the neurobiological system that

enables us to regain balance and stability and bounce back from any degree or level of disruption.

In this way, I see this book as a reframe of what it means to be resilient—of how resilience develops and is shaped over time, and why it matters. When we accept that uncertainty is a given in life, not an aberration, then nurturing resilience becomes an everyday opportunity—and it happens most fruitfully within the context of your relationship with your child. Resilience is an outcome of the care parents provide every single day, coupled with the kindness, attention, and reactions they show in response to what their child needs, whether that is comforting a child, picking them up at school, preparing dinner, or listening to them vent about their day. These interactions matter and add up to a relationship that becomes the incubator for resilience. This is not about perfection. It is about establishing and carrying out a loving, stable, and connected day-to-day relationship, as I will show you throughout this book.

If you've read my first book, *How Toddlers Thrive*, you will no doubt recognize some of the consistencies in what young and older children need to grow and develop optimally. This time I am addressing parents of children of all ages, identifying and expanding upon the universals of what grounds children and teens and helps them form a strong base to grow into thriving human beings. (Throughout this book I use the term "parent" to refer to all caregivers, including guardians and others who have formative relationships with children.)

In my primary role as director of Barnard College's Center for Toddler Development and in related work with parents of older children and teens, I have the pleasure of wearing many hats (sometimes many at once!) on any given day—that of educator, clinician, researcher, and advocate, from teaching college students, parents, and professionals about child development and the many individual ways children vary, to conducting research aimed at understanding parental impacts on children, to interpreting these studies to advocate for

children's needs, to working directly with parents and children. I spend my days asking what children and teens need to establish a foundation for healthy, adaptable, compassionate growth no matter what life throws their way. It's one thing to learn how to address a challenging behavior that your four- or fourteen-year-old zings you with so you have a way to handle it the next time. It's another matter altogether to understand what motivates such behaviors so you can learn how to relate better to your child and solve these issues for the long run and in a way that helps them, too. In other words, I will show you ways to support your child's optimal development so they learn to become resilient now and into the future.

Over the last several decades, many important studies connecting developmental psychology to neurobiology have been conducted. I see my role as translating this valuable body of work, along with my own research on parents and children, and offering families an approach that asks you to make a slight perspective shift and think about parenting in the context of your relationship with your child. Instead of parenting from a top-down perspective, you create a relationship with your child that acts as both container and anchor. As the anchor, parents function like a stable moor that steadies the so-called boat that is the growing child, keeping it from being tossed about in strong currents or storms. When a child can rely on this steadying force, they are more likely to internalize a sense of safety along with the knowledge that they will be okay, despite a storm or change in their midst. As the anchor, you help steady your child emotionally and physically when they are unsure or upset and give them the tools to become their independent, confident, and compassionate selves.

As containers, parents build and nurture a relationship that offers children a physical and emotional space where they can experience and express all of their feelings. The containing relationship enables a child to learn how to manage intense, negative feelings be-

cause the child comes to know they are not alone. By providing this safe space, children are encouraged to be their authentic self, without ridicule, judgment, or shame. Every child needs a place where they are accepted fully and understood, and the parent relationship that acts as a container provides this sense of security.

You may not necessarily be aware of how you are already acting as an anchor and container, but it is what you do when you calm your upset child or handle a meltdown, set a reasonable limit regarding jumping on the couch or cell phone use, set up a routine for bedtime or to do homework, or help them handle their worries about starting high school. The challenge, of course, is that the work of anchoring and containing (being in a relationship is work after all) isn't always easy to do in the context of real life. You may have moments when it feels nearly impossible, when emotions run high for you and for your child or teen, or when you feel like you have not a single ounce of patience left. At times like these, it will be harder to hold and anchor them—and yourself, for that matter.

I've been there, too, as a mother myself. My approach is not about perfection, it's about practicality. I've developed five pillars that give shape to the developmental and neurobiological underpinnings of resilience and show you concrete ways to be both a container and an anchor whether your child is two, ten, or sixteen. I provide many time-tested strategies for busy, stressed-out parents, and for parents who are feeling okay and just want to do a better job at helping their child become more adaptable. The strategies are not autocratic codes of behavior. Rather these are clearly defined guideposts you can depend on to help your children learn foundational skills to grow and develop emotionally, intellectually, and socially—regardless of their personality, temperament, background, or experiences of stressors or trauma. They are applicable to every child at every age. When parents are able to step in and provide reliable, loving stability to their children, great things can happen. And that's perhaps a bonus: when

you use this approach and incorporate the five pillars, you nurture a lifelong relationship with your child, one that both of you will value for years to come.

My approach supports parents as well as children. You will discover insightful examples from the field that offer you a source of succor and support, as well as a series of Reflective Questions to prompt connections between your past experience and your parenting now. Clearly, during times of uncertainty, everyone has to work a little harder to stay grounded and focused on what matters most—the well-being of our children. Feeling unstable, as we do when life's uncertainty increases, can interfere with our best intentions, making us more anxious and worried. This is why becoming aware of our responses as parents helps us manage our *own* emotions and worries first, without unwittingly hoisting them onto our children. Often, at times of accelerated emotions, we move fast, too fast, without giving ourselves the time to figure out the best route. We act out of our own fears and our unwavering desire to protect our children. We can act without thinking. When this happens, we run the risk of stepping in too forcefully, even when it is in a loving way. We can undermine our children's natural ability to grow a sense of agency and ability to overcome challenges, which they need as a foundation for positive growth. Beyond this, parents' well-intended yet overly forward actions can sometimes shame their children rather than support their growth. My approach guides parents to find the sweet spot where they are present and grounded themselves and thereby able to offer guidance and, when appropriate, let go so children can safely test their own resilience.

The book is organized in two parts. Part one, "The Roots of Resilience," establishes the foundation of my approach by first acknowledging why times of uncertainty feel so disruptive and anxiety-provoking to all of us, parents and children alike. Then we'll examine what we can learn from dealing with stress, adversity, and traumatic

experiences and why it is important to understand this in order to help children grow on a daily basis, establishing the foundations they need to face life whether times are smooth or rough. Part one also includes an explanation of the psychology and neurobiology of the attachment relationship, the core of how you first connect to your child and how you can continue to build this connection as your child becomes more independent. This relationship is directly tied to how children cope in life, handle emotions and the obstacles they will inevitably face, all on the road to building resilience. You'll learn to see, as well, the influence your own childhood experience brings to your parenting, a key factor in understanding your relationship with your child, your reactions to them, and how to best support them. This process involves looking at how you were raised, including identifying the missing pieces or missed opportunities in your upbringing that may be silently driving your anxiety and actions with your children.

Part two focuses on the five pillars of your child's resilience, presented alongside numerous practical strategies that parents can use in the here and now to help their child build the capacities that undergird resilience. The five pillars show parents how to:

1. Provide emotional safety so your child can build inner trust
2. Help your child learn how to emotionally regulate so they can manage their emotions
3. Establish limits alongside freedom to make mistakes, so that your child feels motivated to explore and learn
4. Connect with your child, so they develop social skills, empathy, and the confidence to connect authentically with others
5. Accept your child for who they are, without judgment or shame, so they accept and love themselves, the key to well-being, happiness, and compassion

These pillars of resilience are not a linear set of guidelines but can be used in whatever manner or order makes most sense to you and your family. Together they will enable your child to thrive, even through the toughest times. At the end of the day, when it can often feel like raising children today gets to be daunting, I return to the fact that I am an incurable optimist, filled with hope for our futures. My optimism stems from the fact that I've seen hundreds—if not thousands—of children and parents pull through countless situations that at first looked insurmountable, and with support and connection watched them move forward with strength and resilience. In every child, adolescent, and emerging adult is a young person poised to grow, learn, and flourish despite inevitable imperfections of their environment or obstacles in their path. I view parents in a similar light: as individuals who come to parenting with their own history and who want above all to do what's best for their child, even when it is hard. In all of our lives, disappointments, fears, loss, and pain are inevitable, but they also provide opportunities for parents to help their children to adapt and grow. These challenging moments are the unintended gifts of building resilience.

Raising children is not only for today, or this moment; it is a lifelong endeavor. The benefits of nurturing your relationship with your child, with eyes simultaneously on the present and the future, give children a robust, ongoing opportunity to build the emotional and social skills that will enable them to become their full selves—independent, resourceful people who are caring and compassionate toward others and, importantly, able to handle the ups and downs of life and thrive. And just as important is raising children who want to return home to you even when they are grown-up and out in the world.

PART I

The Roots of Resilience

CHAPTER 1

The Opportunity During Times of Uncertainty

Global pandemic, high death rates, racial and social unrest, a fragile economy, social isolation, and climate disasters. Any one of these factors can create a sense of uncertainty. And of course, during times of uncertainty, it's natural to feel more anxious, especially as a parent caring and responsible for children. You begin to doubt your own instincts, feel less assured about how to engage with your children, and go into generalized worry mode, imagining long-range consequences as foregone conclusions. From this vantage point, many parents look toward the future as if it's a vast and terrible unknown that is impossible to prepare for.

These concerns are not unreasonable. As a child psychologist specializing in the effects of population-wide trauma, I have made it my life's work to understand how to best set up children to thrive in spite of adversity. Even before the pandemic, large-scale social changes were impacting everyday family life. The ubiquitous presence of and near-total reliance on technology, the pernicious influence of social media, the dwindling opportunities for in-person anything, and the growing dread related to climate change have been threatening the health and well-being of children and teens—all of it placing an increasing pressure on parents to protect children from a future that is

hard to imagine. Without a doubt, parents today feel overwhelmed and often insecure, unable to trust that they know how best to raise our children under so much stress—both concrete and existential.

Even in the best of times, being a parent requires hard and intentional work. The responsibility to protect, nurture, and take care of our most precious beings challenges us at our core—regardless of our resources—and can make us feel exquisitely vulnerable. During times of uncertainty this vulnerability is heightened further. Even everyday changes can make us feel less grounded. In this state, any event that creates upheaval in our day-to-day lives has the potential to set off a threat response at the cellular level of our brains and bodies. When activated, this automatic fight-flight-freeze response increases our anxiety and makes it difficult to discern between real harm and imagined dangers. Our reactions and the way our brains respond to both seemingly small incidents of change and bigger, even traumatic, events follow similar neurobiological patterns because as humans we rely on the same pathways of responding to stress regardless of the magnitude of the stressor. (You'll read more about this innate human stress response in chapter four.)

In such a heightened state of alarm and worry, it becomes difficult to not only stay grounded and clear on how best to raise our children but also remember a remarkable, hope-filled truth: that given the neuroplasticity of our brains (the ability of the brain to change or rewire based on new experiences), we all have the capacity to adapt to even the harshest challenges. This ability to adapt is essential to our survival and key to building resilience and bouncing back after hardship and trauma. Think of a stroke patient who is unable to move their hand initially, but gradually and with practice regains this ability as the brain adapts and restores function. Or how a young student with ADHD learns to focus and gains confidence once his parents move him to a more supportive middle school. A

child I worked with following the World Trade Center attacks reacted with hour-long tantrums and sleep refusals if an alarm went off in the apartment building to which they fled when the planes hit the nearby towers, or if he heard any sirens. With support from his parents and practice with an alarm that he could turn on and off himself, the tantrums lessened, and he stopped having such strong reactions. His brain readapted to this noise and learned that it was no longer a threat. So while the stress of uncertainty tests our capacity to adapt, it's hugely important to our ability to learn and incorporate new information, use knowledge and emotional understanding to adjust to new environments, and face and move through hard situations and establish our equilibrium again—all of which comprise the essence of resilience.

During the pandemic, I conducted a research study of over one hundred families of children under the age of eight to develop a more nuanced understanding of the psychological and social impact brought on by the uncertainty accompanying the large-scale effects of the pandemic. I wanted to understand how parents and children responded, then adapted to the unprecedented situation. The number one reported behavioral change in children during the first year of the pandemic was regression—reverting to bed-wetting, night awakenings, or using baby talk, and an inability to take care of themselves in ways they did in the past. For older children this meant a greater reliance on parents and some loss of independence. I spoke with one parent whose preschooler—typically a happy, healthy eater—refused to eat anything for a number of days in response to the rapid changes and stress at home. (With the intervention of their pediatrician, she got back on track.) Sibling rivalries often became more intense in children of all ages, causing fights that further escalated the stress quotient of the home environment. From a psychological point of view, these behavioral changes showed children in the midst of

adjusting to new circumstances. Was it the pandemic itself or the sudden need to adjust wrought by the pandemic that caused such reactions? My research and experience point to the latter.

Let me explain.

Any kind of change requires readjustment—emotionally, physically, cognitively. Major life changes ask us to interact with our peers or families in slightly (or greatly) different ways. Sometimes these adjustments happen automatically. Sometimes it can take longer—a day, week, even a year—but gradually we get the hang of the new route to town or find a new favorite supermarket or playground. These adjustments may seem inconsequential, even superficial. But let's say you're an older person for whom it takes more energy and time to drive to the supermarket; for that person, learning a new route can feel inordinately stressful, even upsetting. Or say you've been sick with the flu, and when you arrive at your regular dry cleaner to find it closed because of new hours, you just lose it and start to cry. We've all had those days when one little exception to the rule feels like just too much. Internally, we are trying hard to assert the so-called status quo by sticking to the familiar—in spite of the new and changed circumstances. This is why we like routines: they ground and comfort us. The familiar brings a feeling of calm to our minds and nervous systems. When we encounter change, our brains are more or less hardwired to go through a sequence of adjustments. First, we become aware of the change; next, we try to determine if we can handle the change (an assessment that can cause varying degrees of anxiety or excitement); and then we react—either adjusting well or adjusting with difficulty . . . or somewhere in between the two. Neither is right or wrong.

People who are able to adjust with more ease can be considered flexible or more adaptable; those who have a tougher time making adjustments might be referred to as more rigid. These are not value judgments but rather speak to a very real and partially inborn contin-

uum of adaptability. Most people are readily adaptable some of the time, and less so at other times; adaptability and rigidity can vary depending on the circumstances. The good news is that we can all learn to become more adaptable and adjust to change with greater ease, which means becoming more resilient. This, again, points to the nature of neuroplasticity.

At its root, adapting under pressure is about resilience, which is neither a trait nor a static ability that we either possess or don't possess. Resilience and the capacity to adjust optimally rely on a set of inner resources that can be developed and honed. These resources form the five pillars that I will further describe in the chapters of part two:

1. The trust that you'll be okay despite a present stressor
2. An ability to manage your emotions
3. The motivation to act or assert some control over a situation
4. The awareness to ask for help and connect with others
5. A belief that you matter

These resources are built over time and in response to events and experiences of our lives. However, the parent-child relationship provides a unique opportunity to help our children develop these resources of resilience. Each time we help a child through a challenge, small or large, and help them become more self-aware, they become better able to manage tough emotions that might otherwise interfere with daily functioning—like getting on the school bus, socializing with peers, playing a new sport, or taking a test. When we are there, on the sidelines, as they develop agency and learn that it's okay to ask for help, they build the internal knowledge that they can handle present and future challenges. And when we stay connected and attuned, letting them know they are valued, loved, and accepted for who they are, children develop a strong center, like a reservoir from which they draw when encountering stress and difficulties.

These core resources of resilience are crucial to our children's ability to live full, meaningful lives. They enable them to pivot and move on; to engage and learn now and always; to not only survive severe situations but also thrive despite the pain and loss that can accompany trauma. There will always be stress and challenges in your child's life; that piece is certain. And none of this is meant to overlook or oversimplify the significant hardships and tragedies that many families experience; there is no doubt that trauma, particularly when compounded by multiple traumas, can leave people with long-lasting scars, and resources and support are needed to help alleviate such outcomes. Yet, within and outside of these perilous situations, parents are situated to respond in ways that both buffer the impact and support the growth of their children. If we can support our children to benefit from positive responses during times of stress, we are setting them up to succeed in life.

The Protective Effects of the Parent Relationship

My interest in the parent-child relationship began early and challenged me almost immediately. One of my first opportunities to learn about this dynamic was when, as a teenager, I worked in a summer program for children with a range of emotional and social challenges. One child, Emma, stuck out to me and still does to this day. She was four years old and abused by a mother with severe mental illness whose parental rights were being terminated.

Anytime a limit was set for Emma by a teacher (it's not okay to hit other children, for example), she screamed loudly and nearly uncontrollably for her mother. Initially, I was stunned by this behavior, but I soon became intrigued by the power of this person, the only caregiver she knew. In times when little Emma felt frustrated or vulnerable, she called for the person who'd hurt her and made her feel unsafe, still hoping for protection. This observation made me

curious about the powerful role of parents and children's core needs to feel safe and seek protection—so core that they would even call for an abusive parent during a time of need. I did not yet know terms like "toxic stress," "trauma," "attachment," or "resilience," but soon I would begin to learn about them and view them as related. What could happen when bad and hurtful things befell children, and what could parents do to ensure that children did not suffer long-term negative impacts? What essential role did parents play in how their children developed, especially when facing negative or potentially harmful events in their lives? These questions have motivated me for decades.

Later, while an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan, I chose to study and further investigate the underpinnings of parent-child attachment relationships. These were the early days of attachment studies. I filmed dozens of parent-child attachment protocols, called Strange Situations, the now-well-known research paradigm to assess the factors that defined the quality of the parent-child attachment relationship. Samuel Meisels, my mentor, was studying how early attachment could impact a child's socialization abilities in preschool in a sample of children born prematurely. With my young and not-yet-trained eyes, I observed a wide range of how children reacted when their parents left the room as part of the protocol and then returned. Some children shut down, some screamed, some played. At reunion, most babies, regardless of the intensity of their behavior in response to their mother leaving, felt comforted, settled down, and fairly quickly returned to their exploration and playing. In other words, trust and curiosity returned to the child once their main caregiver, their security, came back. But I was concerned and curious about these children who were unable or reticent to play or engage again in their environment when the parent returned.

This smaller number of children shut down and sat still; they

cried and could not be consoled; or they moved away from the mother and turned their back to her. What was it about the qualities of the relationship that was so necessary for a child to thrive? I then began to wonder about the repercussions if bad things occurred within that dyad—the relationship between parent and child. Could negative impacts be overcome? And if so, how, and what would that look like? I left college with many burning questions about children and how to support them, but mostly with a desire to know more about these incredibly curious and developing people.

Next, I sought out an opportunity to work closely with children and families in the horrendous homeless shelter system in NYC in the late 1980s to closely examine the complexities affecting the parent-child relationship. I was able to work directly with young children, something I loved to do, and observe what happened to children when families were living in crowded conditions under extreme stress, facing a level of uncertainty and fear no one should ever have to deal with. Simultaneously and related to this hands-on work, I conducted research with a policy researcher, Janice Molnar at Bank Street College of Education, on children living in these homeless shelters (called "welfare hotels" at the time). It was disturbing to witness the level of stress and even terror families faced from the complex insults that would undermine any parent's ability to provide basic safety—from lack of permanent housing to violence to food insufficiency. And yet, what I also saw were mothers (most shelters only allowed mothers with children) who, against the odds, continued to find ways to protect their children from lasting harm. I also saw parents who, under the unbearable severe weight of it all, were unable to give their children the psychological or physical safety they needed. I asked myself, yet again, why can a subset of parents provide protective care even with unimaginable obstacles in their way while others, quite understandably given the circumstances, are unable to meet these essential needs of their children?

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