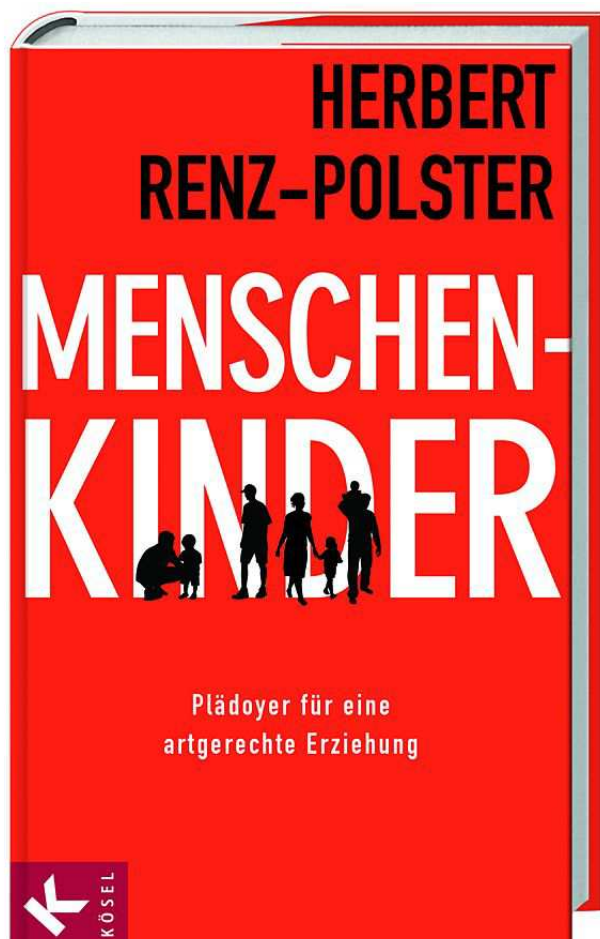


# Foreign Rights Information



Herbert Renz-Polster

## Child-like

[Menschenkinder]

A plea for species-  
appropriate  
parenting



## At a glance

When it comes to modern childhood, all is definitely not well. But are parents really to blame? Are they not strict enough, as Chinese “tiger mothers” contend? This criticism is too cheap. In fact our entire society is creating a world that is not in line with the species-typical expectations of human children. Instead of resorting to fashionable – and ever changing – parenting advice we should take a step back and look at how children have developed in their evolutionary history.

Herbert Renz-Polster  
Child-like. A plea for species-  
appropriate parenting  
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## Press commentaries

"A book that simply outruns the standard parenting methods."

*(Familie & Co) [popular parenting magazine]*

"This book equals a gripping criminal story.

It is next to impossible to put the publication down."

*(Dr. Armin Krenz, in: Handbook for nursery and preschool teachers)*

"As paediatricians we can help parents become

more independent from questionable parenting advice.

For this purpose we should take up and spread Renz-Polster's plea."

*(Kinder- und Jugendärz) [Journal of the German Association for Primary Care*

*Paediatricians)*

"If the book was a little heavier, I'd always have it in my bag to beat all those

smart-aleck educators round the head with it."

*(M. Burchardt, philosopher)*

"It hits the bull's eye. Reserve some time: there is considerable danger

that you read through the book in one go."

*(Unerzogen) [Quarterly parenting magazine]*



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## The Author



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## What do children need ?

*(Chapter 1, sample translation by Emily Burns Heyser)*

One of the clearest signs that a nursing baby will eventually become a deranged adult is that it refuses to empty its bowels when placed on the potty. So said the most famous and influential psychoanalyst of the modern era, Sigmund Freud. He actually believed that infants would become neurotic adults if they didn't do their business upon command. Little infants!

How could Professor Freud have come to such a conclusion? And even more important: Could he have been RIGHT?

IS IT TRUE that children up to "the age of 8 or 9" have no personality, as Michael Winterhoff, a shooting star among today's so-called experts on bringing up children, contends? That children's intelligence develops because a foreign language is spoken and chemical experiments are conducted in their kindergarten? That small children that are conditioned to share their sandbox spade with other children will later develop into especially good citizens? IS THIS TRUE?

And now the Chinese have entered into the equation. Boyed by the high PISA test scores out of Shanghai, Amy Chua's book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* has swept the world. "Children would never themselves choose to work. Hence it is essential to override their preferences." And *totally* override them. The words "nuclear warfare," with which Mrs Chua describes her approach to raising children, may sound unpleasant, but they certainly help in reaching the top of bestseller lists. Where so much advice is given, parents have to do something right – isn't that so?

This is the environment in which today's parents must raise their children: A variety of "experts" claims things about children that suit the "experts" themselves. Each theory has a devoted following, and each theory (no matter how wrong-headed) will be recycled again and again.



## **Castles in the air, ready for occupancy**

The confusion begins right after birth: How much closeness does such a small person need? Not too much, say some – the little one could become spoiled. Never enough, say the others; a strong bond creates trust that lasts for life. The same goes for sleeping arrangements. Should the baby sleep next to the mother? Or should it have its own bed, to encourage quicker independence? Then there's the question of early attendance of nursery schools: Can one put an infant in a nursery – or does that go against its natural needs? And what about kindergarten - should the parents choose one where the emphasis is on playing or one where numbers are taught? And when a child attends school, should the teachers' approach be to drill the pupils or to encourage self-discovery?

The majority opinion on these questions changes as often as hem lengths in the fashion world. *Naturally* children need punctuality, early toilet training and by-the-clock feeding: This was our grandparents' conviction. For most of our parents, it was just as natural that children DIDN'T need these things. At the end of the 1990s, it was firmly believed that children should receive early "promotion", and so much of it that the nurseries of the republic suddenly resonated with the sounds of Mozart's music, since the latter purportedly quenched a few more IQ points from a child's growing brain. And when it comes to "limits", it once again has become a foregone conclusion that today's children lack them. IS ANY OF THIS TRUE?

The only thing that one can be sure about is that raising children is a wonderful playground for speculators. Their assumptions are apparent at first glance, and can certainly be confirmed by some theory or other. If only there wasn't a slight problem: those wonderful theories contradict one another. And so parents are faced with a sobering fact: A good part of what is claimed about raising children is actually FALSE. Usually well-intended, but nonsense nevertheless.



In this book, I will demonstrate that

- the nonsense will only stop when we learn something about the thousands of years of history of human children – and in this way something about the roots of their development
- it is too easy to blame the parents when we as a society are having problems with children
- we must pose a question about HUMAN CHILDREN that is usually posed only about chicks: Do they live in a species-appropriate environment?

It ´s not the childrens´ fault that we haven´t really come up with new ideas about how to raise kids. Nor does this result from the parents´ lack of a “parenting license”. In fact, it has to do with all of us. Too long, we have avoided taking a tour through the “village” in which our children now grow up. What is going wrong there? Do children, teenagers, mothers, families really take centre stage, as they should? Why then do children, who are supposed to be an asset, represent a poverty risk? Why do we need an increasing number of “crying units”, “sleep consultants”, speech therapists, physical therapists and other developmental assistants for our children? How can it be that our schools produce not just a large number of educated children but also at least as many “failures”? Are we adults in the process of building a world that increasingly sees children as obstacles – and also places an increasing number of obstacles in their path?

### **Let´s take new measurements**

With this book, I demand a new standard, against which ALL claims about children have to be measured. I urge that we include in our discussions about children a consideration of how they have evolved over thousands of years.





Why? Because our children carry within them a history that still influences their life today. If we want to be fair to our children, we must know something about this history.

I am speaking about humans' evolutionary history. All life forms on this earth bear within themselves the imprints of the past; these help them to survive and to thrive. This is also the case for our children. How they behave and develop is not a matter of chance. Behind it is a pattern, one that has been passed on from generation to generation. This pattern is a response to the challenges that children have faced again and again throughout history.

This pattern is the reason why children's developmental stages are the same throughout the world, no matter how different the environment in which children grow up. And it is the reason why today's children are so similar to those who were born in times in which almost EVERYTHING was different from the way that it is today.

This perspective can change how we raise our children. If we take into consideration how children have developed over thousands of years we will automatically encounter more STRENGTHS than deficiencies, defects or weaknesses. After all, on their path through history, children had to perfect everything that helped a small, immature person become a large, successful adult. They had to learn how best to tackle growing up. True, a child's development is not always a matter of sunshine and roses for the parents (just think of the infamous temper tantrums), but yet it commands optimism: This development is based on a sampling of what has *worked* in the past (tantrums included; we'll get back to that later).

At the very least, one thing should have become clear: A child who builds upon such a millennia-long development is in fact a "prepared" being. One cannot simply make claims that fit into one's own agenda about a creature that has been primed by evolution.



### **Another new theory?**

Am I proposing another theory, another method of raising children, another recipe for success? No. I am not presenting any new claims in this book about how children's psyche works.

What I am doing, instead, is to provide a new perspective – as well as a wakeup call. Those who truly wish to support children must understand the roots of their development. For far too long, we have made our children dance to the latest trendy theories, tested the latest fashion on them – made them into guinea pigs. AGAINST THIS BAD HABIT, I wish to ram in the stake of evolution.

However much the world may admire Chinese growth rates, when it comes to how children grow and become strong, nothing has changed in the least. Who, pray tell, can guarantee us that the “children optimisers” who are now all the rage and who call for more pressure and drill are not confusing the needs of the economy with the needs of the children? Who can guarantee that those who now wish to rehabilitate childhood as quickly as possible aren't transferring their own problems to their children? And who can guarantee us that their speculative bubbles won't burst just like the earlier ones did – such as the nearly forgotten anti-authoritarian approach? Again, I wish to call for a check on what we claim about children. It is my firm conviction that the question of *where* we should go can only be answered by those who know the answer to the question of *whence* we came.

The standard that I demand here is not simply my own idea. It has its own weight – the weight of many thousands of years, during which our children became what they are today. We need this weight in order for the castles in the air to land on the ground again. We need this weight so that we can talk again about children AS THEY ARE – not as we piece them together to fit the ideas or fads of the day.