



Growing Each Other Up: When Our Children Become Our Teachers

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

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From growing their children, parents grow themselves, learning the lessons their children teach. “Growing up”, then, is as much a developmental process of parenthood as it is of childhood. While countless books have been written about the challenges of parenting, nearly all of them position the parent as instructor and support-giver, the child as learner and in need of direction. But the parent-child relationship is more complicated and reciprocal; over time it transforms in remarkable, surprising ways. As our children grow up, and we grow older, what used to be a one-way flow of instruction and support, from parent to child, becomes instead an exchange. *We* begin to learn from *them*. The lessons parents learn from their offspring—voluntarily and involuntarily, with intention and serendipity, often through resistance and struggle—are embedded in their evolving relationships and shaped by the rapidly transforming world around them.

With *Growing Each Other Up*, Macarthur Prize-winning sociologist and educator Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot offers an intimately detailed, emotionally powerful account of that experience. Building her book on a series of in-depth interviews with parents around the country, she offers a counterpoint to the usual parental development literature that mostly concerns the adjustment of parents to their babies’ rhythms and the ways parents weather the storms of their teenage progeny. The focus here is on the lessons emerging adult children, ages 15 to 35, teach their parents. How are our perspectives as parents shaped by our children? What lessons do we take from them and incorporate into our worldviews? Just how much do we learn—often despite our own emotionally fraught resistance—from what they have seen of life that we, perhaps, never experienced? From these parent portraits emerges the shape of an education composed by young adult children—an education built on witness, growing, intimacy, and acceptance.

Growing Each Other Up is rich in the voices of actual parents telling their own stories of raising children and their children raising them; watching that fundamental connection shift over time. Parents and children of all ages will recognize themselves in these evocative and moving accounts and look at their own growing up in a revelatory new light.

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