

"If old gender roles don't allow parents to live the rich, diverse lives they want, then there is an alternative. Read this and consider how our lives could be richer."
—Joan Blades, cofounder of MomsRising.org and MoveOn.org



Equally Shared Parenting

Rewriting the Rules
for a New Generation of Parents

Marc and Amy Vachon

Foreword by Lisa Belkin, *New York Times* reporter

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An empowering guide to the Equally Shared Parenting movement, for the millions of Generation X/Yers looking to discover a new model for parenthood.

Equally Shared Parenting arms readers with the tools to create a balanced life that is rarely experienced by the parents of young children-an evolution that goes beyond the involved dad married to the working mom. This is a lifestyle in which couples create their own model as parenting partners, equals and peers. Every couple gets to write the rules that work for them. For Marc and Amy Vachon, it means working equal hours, spending equal time with the children, and taking equal responsibility for the home. No one is the keeper of the to-do lists; neither of their careers takes precedence.

Equally Shared Parenting clearly outlines the benefits and challenges of equal parenting, covering everything from child-rearing practices, career, and home, to self, money, and society. It presents both the philosophy behind this lifestyle and the everyday steps needed to achieve and maintain it, regardless of income bracket, lifestyle choices, or profession.

Equally Shared Parenting: Rewriting the Rules for a New Generation of Parents Details

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From Reader Review Equally Shared Parenting: Rewriting the Rules for a New Generation of Parents for online ebook

Dayspring says

I randomly picked this book off the shelf at Powell's because the title caught my eye, and I'm so glad I stumbled upon it. I connected with much about the authors' frustrations with traditional parenting roles, and the lack of examples for how to implement truly shared parenting.

The authors make no qualms about the fact that this is not an academic book based on in-depth research or theoretical frameworks. The book emerged from their own experiences and the organization that they founded to help connect like-minded couples with resources and community. While I would have enjoyed the additional of more sociological and psychological theory, I was impressed with the authors' incorporation of examples from many different ESP (equally shared parenting) couples. The stories are inspiring, and they include examples from families representing a range of career paths, financial situations, and cultural backgrounds. One caveat - the book is definitely geared toward two-parent, heterosexual, able-bodied couples. While a few examples of same-sex couples are included, the book focuses a lot on societal gender roles and gendered parenting expectations, and the suggestions for how to form an equal partnership as parents is definitely geared toward male/female couples. There also is little mention of other challenges such as divorce, disability, etc.

That being said, I really enjoyed the book and found the overall philosophical premise and the practical suggestions to be interesting and helpful.

Carli says

I sat up and took notice when the Vachons and other ESP couples were profiled in an article in the NY Times in 2008. I've always wanted children but that desire has evolved into true ambivalence; I want children but I don't want to succumb to the very gendered ways relationships that include children tend to change. I am very committed to the principles of equality with my partner and balance in my own life and ESP speaks directly to that. I am thrilled and excited to see that there are people very deliberately making choices that preserve those very principles. So far, I am really enjoying the book. I highly recommend it to couples and parents.

Okay, I've now finished the book and it is definitely worth reading for the above reasons. Obviously, ESP won't be for everyone, but it's worthwhile to consider the challenge they are making to conventional thinking, especially when you are committed to certain principles. I'm afraid a lot of people will reject ESP before truly giving it the consideration it merits. Sure, it asks you to revise a lot of socialization, to reject many familial and societal expectations, and to revise your thinking on material wealth. But the results are worth it. After all, what change do we want to see in the world? What lessons do we want our children to take from the way we ourselves live our lives? Not that they are constrained by their gender, or that money is most important in life, or that they "can't have it all."

Sean says

The core concept of "Equally Shared Parenting" is pretty simple--both parents should strive for equity in all aspects of family life after having a child. This includes not only child-rearing, but also housework, income, and life balance (hobbies). Equity means that both parents should reduce their work hours a bit, rather than having one parent stay at home and the other work a full-time job. In the area of child-rearing, the Vachons argue for both parents taking turns doing each child-related job (other than breastfeeding). The same goes for housework--both parents should be equally adept at vacuuming, laundry, and fixing the car.

I don't have a problem with this family structure as a goal. I'm sure that it works fine for a lot of people. I'm just not sure that there's enough meat in either the vision and goals or the actual mechanics of Equally Shared Parenting to merit an entire book. The book suffers from a great deal of repetition of a few very simple ideas. The content feels far better suited to a feature article in a parenting magazine and was clearly stretched mightily in order to extend it to book length.

Tasha says

I'm disappointed that most of the examples of equally shared parenting couples in the book are upper middle class or above (doctors & lawyers), or work in fields that are known for being flexible (artists, designers). There is one example of a lower middle to middle class family where one parent does different work, depending on the season, but more examples would have been appreciated, especially since the finance chapter doesn't delve into too many specifics.

Meg says

I would recommend Halving It All over this book - it was much more helpful and detailed, and more useful lessons. I was lukewarm on this book. Maybe it's just that my partner and I already follow this philosophy and have a pretty solid set of habits going, but I found it to be overly general and bland, and I didn't get much that was new. I did like how they divided a family's life into four domains (career, childcare, home, and self) to explore how things are divided across these domains. And they did give a lot of specific examples of how people divide things up differently. Still, I felt the book made a lot of assumptions that its readers would be middle-to-upper-income people. For example, most of the suggestions about finding flexibility in your career assumed certain settings (corporate/ business/ white-collar).

Bridget says

Offers some good thinking on what it means to live a happy and sustainable life.

Amanda says

This book had a lot of interesting ideas that made sense. I didn't agree with everything they put out there, but I like the idea of challenging our country's definition of the ideal worker (40 hours a week, regular business hours, coming in earlier and leaving later warrants awards and recognition, etc.) and of re-evaluating what is important and what makes you happy. Shouldn't leading a balanced life be more valuable than being an "ideal" worker?

Archana says

A phenomenal book that really articulates my philosophy on parenting. The only critique I have is the fact that all the case studies downplay parents' professional ambitions. Most of the people they profile end up working from home, free-lancing, or starting their own businesses. It would be great to have more tactics for dual-working couples who have full-time employment and don't want to or can't work for themselves.

Sarah says

I just started this book and I am thankful that there are actually parents/people out there that think like me. I feel like I fall in-between the stay-at-home mom types and career driven childless by choice women. I know that this approach is not for everyone, nor is everything they are suggesting something that works for me. That said, this book really breaks down gender roles (which I am not sure is entirely possible) but it is definitely food for thought. Highly recommend for parents and anyone considering becoming a parent. Yes, you can have it all with balance.

Hilary says

I misunderstood what the book was about till a couple of chapters in, and then got more and more annoyed. They advocate splitting everything equally: parenting, careers, housework, leisure time. Sounds good, till you realise they *really* mean "equal", and seem to think that taking turns to work 4 10-hour days is somehow better than both working at the same time, and sharing evenings and weekends together with the children. In the book, both parents do an equal share of everything.

We're not interested in "equal", we're interested in *fair*. That means I don't have to cook if I don't like it, but I might do all the organizing instead. We consider that fair; making someone do something they don't like or actively dislike, just to be "equal", rather than letting the person who enjoys it go ahead, seems artificial at best.

Marriage is about a partnership, not necessarily equality. Equal isn't for everyone. I think I was really expecting this book to be about co-parenting, where neither is a primary caregiver, and both parents take equal care of the child. That's something we practiced from the beginning.

Will says

I was pretty familiar with most of the ideas in this book from other things I've read and from the NYT

magazine article featuring the authors, but I really enjoyed reading this. I think it's well worth reading by any parents who are interested in keeping the various aspects of their life (work, family, hobbies, and relationships) balanced. In fact, I wish I could make it required reading for all new parents.

Some of the examples (intentionally, I think) play up gendered stereotypes, which is probably intended to make the book friendlier and more approachable, but I found it a little irritating at times.

Amazingly, the hardcover is available from a lot of Amazon sellers for \$0.01 + \$3.99 shipping... well worth picking up a copy if this sounds like something you'd be interested in.

Nd says

Great book. Very good at getting into the practical and logistical aspects to this.

It is also good at "framing", in the sense of making visible illogical biases such as when a man says, "my wife can choose to work or not, I gave her the choice". The too often invisible presumption in this that he is entitled to first access to resources, his job is more important, he is entitled to paid compensation, she is not, he has no responsibility for unpaid work of meeting a child's needs.

Lisa says

After hearing a few interviews with the couple, I was intrigued and wanted more information. The book addresses most of the issues I could think of (and more). Some of the approaches and tips are useful for any couple, regardless of how equally-shared things might be, and it definitely provides useful tips for any couples looking to move toward more balance for both parties.

Louise says

2.5 stars

Maybe I'm lucky enough to already have a good relationship with my husband where we split things like chores and childcare roles pretty fairly (as fairly as we can considering biological differences) but I found a lot of the content in this book to be no-brainers. The book does make some assumptions based on traditional gender roles in families, but I can see how that may apply to other readers. Overall, I didn't find this book very helpful or informative. It did provide some options for changing your and your partner's schedule around to accommodate caring for a child, but it assumes that one or both of you have fairly flexible careers for that, so it may not apply to most people.

Erin Brady says

A very realistic view of what it means and what it takes to share the task of parenting together. Marc and Amy Vachon share their experiences as well as those of other ESP parents in a variety of situations in order

to encourages this lifestyle as well as to caution those who are not yet prepared to handle all that it takes in order to truly adopt a fully equal partnership in all domains. I would recommend this book to anyone looking to take a step into ESP living!
