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WHAT ARE WE DOING WRONG?

A forward-thinking behavioral scientist reveals the key to raising better young citizens and building a healthier society

The Nurture Effect

How *the* Science of Human Behavior
Can Improve Our Lives & Our World

ANTHONY BIGLAN, PHD

“The Nurture Effect is one of those rare books that draws from a lifetime of careful scientific study to provide clear prescriptions about how to make our world a better place.”

~ **Jacob S. Hacker**, Stanley B. Resor Professor of political science at Yale University

“This marvelous book integrates the most compelling scientific knowledge about how we can improve the lives of citizens of this country with a bold call to action.”

~ **William Beardslee**, Professor of child psychiatry at Harvard Medical School

“Please read this book! ... If you want to improve the now and better the future, read this book and apply the Nurture Effect at home, at work or at school, and in your community.”

~ **Dennis D. Embry**, PhD, president and senior scientist at the PAXIS Institute

A glance through the news headlines today is rarely encouraging.

Schools are failing. The wealth and achievement gaps are increasing. Once-great American cities are decaying. Our mental and physical health—and the healthcare system that supposedly exists to support them—appear to be on shakier ground than ever.

And this just scratches the surface when it comes to the sources of fear, stress, and despair

in modern life. Worse still, it seems as though attempts to address them leads to scattershot policymaking that provides temporary solutions without striking at the root causes.

What are we doing wrong?

What if there were a simple answer to this question... a single shift in mindset that could be applied to solve many (if not all) of these societal woes in one fell swoop?

And what if it were hiding in plain sight?

This is indeed the case, and in **THE NURTURE EFFECT** Dr. Anthony Biglan — a pioneer in the field of behavioral science reveals it along with clear, specific action steps to leverage its power for individuals, families, schools, and finally for all society. By prioritizing the creation of nurturing environments at home, in school, at work, and everywhere else, Dr. Biglan advances a bold new method for wide-ranging societal improvement.

Behavioral science is a relatively new branch of the sciences, and only recently has its potential to vastly change lives for the better been glimpsed. In **THE NURTURE EFFECT**, Dr. Biglan draws on the famous early behavioral work of scientists like B.F. Skinner, and synthesizes it with cutting-edge new research to make the case for nurture as the missing ingredient in the most troubled aspects of modern life.

The Nurture Effect

How *the* Science of
Human Behavior
Can Improve
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ANTHONY BIGLAN, PHD
FOREWORD BY **STEVEN C. HAYES, PHD**
AFTERWORD BY **DAVID SLOAN WILSON, PHD**

THE NURTURE EFFECT will prove as valuable to parents (for whom nurture is an absolutely essential concept to master) as it will to educators and policymakers. Dr. Biglan conveys advanced concepts in easy-to-understand language that makes the book accessible to the lay reader without sacrificing substance.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

THE NURTURE EFFECT: How the Science of Human Behavior Can Improve Our Lives and Our World

Hardcover: 288 pages

Price: \$26.95

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From raising children to running classrooms to crafting broad legislative reforms, **THE NURTURE EFFECT** outlines a complete theory and practice for making headway on the most stubborn individual and social problems.

For parents:

- The power of prosociality: Teaching children to restrain impulsive behavior and cooperate with others.
- Why minimizing prenatal stress is one of the most overlooked and essential parts of raising healthy, happy, well-behaved kids.
- Teaching the behaviors that will make adolescence a time of thriving growth rather than rebellious self-destruction.
- Ensuring children are spending time with peers who will encourage them to grow rather than lead them into trouble.

For educators:

- How to reduce aversive, threatening behavior in the classroom without resorting to harsh punishment.
- Ways to reinforce cooperation and self-regulation, whether or not the students are receiving the proper guidance at home.
- Navigating the requirements of the Common Core State Standards to ensure students don't fall behind their peers.

For policymakers:

- Why regulating the marketing of certain products—not only tobacco and alcohol, but junk food and subtler vices—is essential to nurturing a healthy and happy society. (And how to do this without encroaching on constitutionally-protected freedom.)
- Ensuring that all policy starts with a basis in objective, significant evidence.
- Why working to close the poverty gap, thereby increasing the well-being of millions of families, will have wide-reaching positive effects on the U.S. economy—from top to bottom.

For all citizens:

- The need for increased mindfulness, empathy and forgiveness in our increasingly fast-paced and competitive world.
- The power of psychological flexibility.
- Recommendations for grassroots advocacy.

Despite all the distressing news, we are also making behavioral progress—for example, in the drastic reduction of cigarette consumption in America. **THE NURTURE EFFECT** distills such achievements—which we now understand thanks to behavioral science—down to a repeatable formula

backed by ample data.

The happy lives we want for ourselves and future generations are well within reach. Anyone, truly, anyone, can master Dr. Tony Biglan's method by reading and implementing the ideas found in this hopeful, practical book.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthony Biglan, Ph.D. is a Senior Scientist at Oregon Research Institute and the Co-Director of the Promise Neighborhood Research Consortium. He has been conducting research on the development and prevention of child and adolescent problem behavior for the past 30 years. His work has included studies of the risk and protective factors associated with tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; high-risk sexual behavior; and antisocial behavior. He has conducted numerous experimental evaluations of interventions to prevent tobacco use both through school-based programs and community-wide interventions. And, he has evaluated interventions to prevent high-risk sexual behavior, antisocial behavior, and reading failure.

In recent years, his work has shifted to more comprehensive interventions that have the potential to prevent the entire range of child and adolescent problems. He and colleagues at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences published a book summarizing the epidemiology, cost, etiology, prevention, and treatment of youth with multiple problems (Biglan et al., 2004). He is a former president of the Society for Prevention Research. He was a member of the Institute of Medicine Committee on Prevention, which recently released its report documenting numerous evidence-based preventive interventions that can prevent multiple problems. As a member of Oregon's Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission, he has helped to develop a strategic plan for implementing comprehensive evidence-based interventions throughout Oregon.

QUESTIONS FOR DR. ANTHONY BIGLAN

1. How does stress affect nurture? Why and how should people prioritize managing their stress levels—and, if applicable, those of their children?
2. What are the foremost challenges to getting policymakers, educators, and average citizens to commit to creating more nurturing environments?
3. When did you realize that the lack of a nurturing environment was the common denominator to so many societal problems?
4. Of the different people who can benefit from your book—parents, educators, policymakers, and more—is there any one group you *most* hope reads and implements its ideas?
5. In your vision for the future that closes the book, you claim that it is “inevitable” that we will move towards a more nurturing society. Why is this the case, in light of our apparent move away from nurturing environments in recent decades?
6. Your book discusses the Common Core State Standards—the somewhat controversial set of standards recently adopted by many public schools nationwide. Do you feel the Common Core has made schools more or less nurturing? How could the standards be improved?
7. We have been trying to overcome problems like poverty, subpar education, and excessive drinking for some time now. What novel approach does behavioral science offer that promises more progress than we’ve found to date?
8. How can the regulations you propose on marketing and advertising be implemented without infringing on the First Amendment’s protections on freedom of speech? How can we be sure it won’t lead to a “big brother” situation where the free market is stifled?
9. When you began as a behavioral scientist forty years ago, did you suspect then that it held the keys to wide-ranging benefits for all society as you outline in this book?
10. What are some problems that *can’t* be solved by a more nurturing environment?

THE KEYS TO A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

No matter the context or the problem at hand, following these universal principles of a nurturing environment creates the best chances at success. Nurturing environments do four things:

1. Minimize toxic social and biological conditions.
2. Teach, promote, and richly reinforce prosocial behavior.
3. Limit influences and opportunities for problem behavior.
4. Promote psychological flexibility, which is a mindful approach to pursuing one’s values even in the face of emotional, cognitive, and real-world challenges.