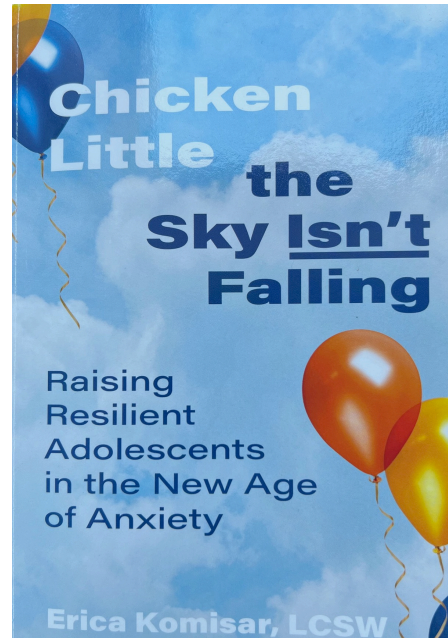

BOOK SUMMARY

"Chicken Little: The Sky Isn't Falling" by Erica Komisar

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You may have heard the saying that once a child is beyond about 7 to 9 years that "the horse has bolted". In other words, with the child's personality now developed, that there is little that one can do to re-form or change what has already been laid down. While some authors maintain that after about 10 years of age, as the saying goes, "the cement has set", Erica Komisar has a different perspective.

Erica Komisar is a clinical social worker who has also majored in psychoanalysis and who has been in private practice in New York City for over 30 years. She writes for various publications including the Wall Street Journal, the New York Daily News and The Washington Post.

Parenting is hard work. We all know that. However, it's not until you experience it do you really understand how hard it is. I've never talked to a parent who said that they had it altogether or that it was an easy journey. Nope. Parents all struggle.

Unfortunately too, there are no manuals to guide you and no rule books to follow. Parents also come into a relationship together with different

expectations about parenting all based on their own upbringing. Further, who says that the way they were brought up was any good anyhow? Besides, life has been changing at a frenetic pace and so what worked for parents a generation ago, probably doesn't work now. So, it doesn't take too much imagination to realise that books like the one written by Komisar that provide practical help are certainly welcomed in what is a confusing and very demanding field ie., being a parent.

The book starts out by painting a somewhat grim picture that statistically, 1 in 5 teenagers have or will have a serious mental illness including depression, anxiety, ADHD and addictions of all kinds (eg., social media, video games, technology, drugs, gambling). With depression for example, between 2012 and 2015, depressive symptoms rose by 21% among boys and a startling 50% among girls. More frightening is the finding that the suicide rate for children in the US aged 10-14 years tripled between 2007-2017 and rose 75% for 15-19 year-olds. Clearly, something significant is changing in our society with alarming stats like these. This book seeks to provide some answers as to why.

In terms of life spans, there are two times in the life cycle when typically, you can expect it to be "rocky". Both have to do with gaining independence. The first is what they call, the "terrible 2s"; the second is adolescence. The two-year-old is becoming confident on his or her feet, begins to run everywhere, explore everything, and get into everything and has started to use language especially that little word "no". In a sense, they start to flex their muscles, explore their world, are inquisitive and are becoming their own little person strutting their independence.

Adolescence is the other period where in a sense, the muscles are being flexed and the limits tested. This is the period when the child wants to be a man or woman -- to be independent and to "do it my way". Interestingly, the author asserts that adolescence can now begin as early as 9 years and end as late as 25 years (that's probably not good news for some parents!).

Komisar maintains that these two periods of "independence" also coincide with significant periods of brain development. She asserts that the first period is from ages 0-3 years when the child's brain is growing rapidly and creating new connections. The Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child released research that found that in the early years of a child's life, over 1 million new neural connections are made every second!

The second process of growth, stretching and pruning of connections in the brain is in puberty or adolescence. This is a period of both rapid growth as well as an equally intense burst of "pruning"; not needed or unused neurons and synapses die off. It's a bit like pruning the weak branches off a tree so that the stronger or healthier branches can grow.

It is in this period of adolescent development and brain development that the author asserts is the next opportunity to try to teach resilience and how to cope with stress in a changing world.

Komisar therefore arranges chapters to discuss the general issues for teenagers (whatever that might be), how to identify the problem, and what to do about it. For example, the central chapters are as follows:

- Gender and Sexual Identity
- Anxiety and Depression
- ADHD, Learning Issues, and Social-Developmental Disorders
- Disordered Eating and Eating Disorders
- Drugs, Alcohol and Vaping
- Technology, Social Media, Gaming and Gambling
- Bullying and Social Media

Interestingly, she ends the book on a sober note. Essentially, as parents, you need to walk the talk. How can you expect your children to be resilient and demonstrate healthy well-being if you haven't got your own life in order? Of course, none of us have got it all together, but the message is clear, make sure that you've got your own life in order first (or are working on it) because modelling is a powerful instructor for children especially adolescence.

It is a practical book with practical tips and one that covers the range of adolescent issues and complaints. You'd do well to have it on your bookshelf.

[Dr Darryl Cross is a clinical and organisational psychologist as well as a credentialed executive and personal coach. He is also an author, speaker and past university lecturer. Dr Darryl assists people to find their strengths and reach their goals. He assists leaders to know how to lead their teams and coach their people and he helps organisations to create positive cultures and workplaces. Further information on Dr Darryl can be seen at www.DrDarryl.com and www.LeadershipCoaching.com.au]