

IN THE FLOW OF CHANGE

NEW PARENTING: RETHINKING OF ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

ANNA BASHKIROVA
IPSOS UU IN RUSSIA
SERVICE LINE LEADER



It is hard to predict with any certainty the kind of people today's children will grow to be in the future. However, we can consider the influence of modern practices and parenting ideas on their development. We can also think about the ways that brands seeking to appeal to this audience can connect with the "new parents"

Quite different ideas may coexist within one single society, depending on the social group or class that people belong to. For this reason, the trends described in this article cannot be extrapolated to all Russian people; some of them are more relevant to the urban population, others remain the

prerogative of a wealthier audience.

However, today's media contributes to the widespread dissemination of any ideas and views. Therefore, many people may rethink their attitudes and beliefs, and this is the context that the "new parenting" is being formed in.

PARENTING IS NOT A SYNONYM FOR MATRIMONY

The first trend in recent years is *distinguishing between parenting and matrimony*. It is noteworthy that the number of both married couples who choose not to have children

and families with unmarried parents is increasing: according to Rosstat, every fifth child in Russia is born out of wedlock today.¹

PARENTING AS A CONSCIOUS STEP

The availability and widespread use of effective contraceptive methods

contributes to a trend of *conscious parenting*. A characteristic feature

¹ Rosstat informs how many children are born out of wedlock in Russia. RIA.ru. 03.03.20

of the modern mothers and fathers is a thoughtful attitude to their role, when the decision to have children is weighted and individual rather than influenced by the state or social norms.

This trend is supported by the active development of reproductive technologies. IVF, egg freezing, and surrogacy make it possible to postpone parenting to a later age and give immediate priority to career development or other activities.

NO PARENTING NORMS

It should be noted that society has *no single normative model of parenting*. Unlike the imperative child-rearing style widely practiced during the USSR times when society would unambiguously dictate what

qualities should be instilled in a future "comrade," the current diversity of thought and practices gives men and women more freedom and blurs the idea that there is one "right" and "wrong" approach.

This blurring of ideas not only allows people to build their individual life paths, but also noticeably contributes to the level of modern parents' anxiety.

CHILDRENS AS A PROJECT

A conscious approach to parenting often leads to a situation when a child becomes *a project*, in which one has to invest economic, time-related, and emotional resources. Now, society sometimes perceives parenting as a potential area of self-actualization. As a result, we see that intense parenting, i.e., maximum involvement

in children's lives and consistent observance of child's interests, a source of extraordinary stress, is becoming more commonplace.

PARENTING AS A SOURCE OF STRESS

The new parents strive to create a favorable psychological climate and an optimal environment for their children's development. When recalling their own childhood, they do their best to prevent similar psychological traumas in their children. *New parents experience higher levels of anxiety, as choices are too wide, the list of duties is endless,*

and the responsibility is heavy as they seek to provide their child with the best. There is a dominant idea that parents are responsible for everything happening to their child now and in the future. As the future wellbeing of their children depends on their choices, parents feel like they are treading a minefield.

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF PARENTING

The axiom of parents' responsibility is fueling the *fashion of expert knowledge*. Child-rearing is more often perceived to be a job requiring

special knowledge and psychological skills. There is an idea that parents need to be taught to be parents. As the commercialization of childhood

has created an incredible industry of goods, it is no surprise that a huge array of information products have also appeared (trainings, lectures, and so on), promising to develop

parenting competencies and provide the knowledge necessary to raise and develop children from the prenatal period.

THE AMBIGUOUS IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Modern parents are bombarded with *a huge amount of contradictory information*, including from people who are not development and child-rearing experts. Judging by the perfect snapshots posted by bloggers online, they are always doing a great job. The unrealism of the beautiful social media picture sets a benchmark, while the need to manage information flows and maneuver between relevant,

fashionable, or obsolete concepts is becoming a serious challenge for responsible parents. Support can also be found through social media, and from parenting forums where thousands of users develop collective standards and create ratings to help people make the right choices among the thousands of available options in the world of children's goods and services.

VIRTUAL GRANDMOTHERS

The digitization of the environment is an important factor. The speed of mastering new technologies not only increases the generational gap between parents and children, but it also emphasizes that the experience of previous generations is no longer in demand. The vigilance of adults

toward gadgets is in conflict with the level of trust that children have in them. AI-based virtual assistants can easily replace grandmothers if there is a need to read a fairy tale or play a cartoon. This form of parenting assistance is steadily growing in Russian households.



PARENTS LOOKING FOR PERSONAL SPACE

The practice of intensive parenting that has become almost standard in urban communities requires high engagement, funds, and leaves little room for the parent's own career achievements. On this path, social success is ensured through the successful implementation of the *child project*. Many parents do not cope well with this and encounter

an *internal conflict* between child-rearing according to Petranovskaya and self-development according to Labkovsky. This is the tension of what will be the more important focus at a particular moment in time: the desire to become a support for one's child or the individualistic desire to take care of oneself.

FAMILIES IN ISOLATION

Families found themselves in an unprecedented situation amid the spread of the coronavirus infection. Isolation, switching to remote work, and distance learning drastically increased the amount of time spent with the family. This had a serious *impact on parent-child relations*. The acute shortage of stability and resources combined with the degree of parents' overload predictably caused a rollback in the trend of an overly intense parental role.

Psychologists and sociologists legitimized parents' experience of burnout, and recent publications have provided grounds for a new ethic: the right to vulnerability and fragility. The accelerated transition to the distant world of the future gave rise to a number of questions around how responsible social institutions are for child-rearing. The remote format of schooling requires even greater engagement from parents engagement in the educational process, thus

The quarantine formed a significant demand for external emotional support. “Put on your own mask first” became a mantra for parents in unstable situations.

increasing inequality between families across many dimensions; parents' income, workload, and education. This demand on parents to engage more in their children's education has begun, and will continue to, trigger

resistance. Parents are already distancing themselves and finding themselves less willing and able to get involved.



A SECRET OF SUCCESSFUL PARENTING

The real situation in our world is such that, regardless of parents' desire to know, guessing how their children will live and what profession they will seek is doomed to failure. But we do know that perfectionism is undoubtedly an obsolete behavioral pattern. No-one can outstrip artificial intelligence in the perfect execution of routine tasks. At the same time, perfectionism is the main enemy of creativity, which will

be so necessary in the digital world of the future. Experts consider creativity one of the four key competencies that will help children successfully cope with the challenges of the future. The remaining three are communication, cooperation, and critical thinking. By fostering the development of these very skills, parents will give their children an obvious competitive benefit.

HOW BRANDS SHOULD WORK WITH “NEW PARENTS”

Based on our understanding of the demands of parenting today, we can give three recommendations to brands looking to appeal to parents.

It is important to help reduce parents' high levels of anxiety about the future and pay attention to “here and now”.

Help parents realize that parenting is a highly controversial, elusive, and

resource-intensive task. Promote the idea that mistakes cannot be avoided, but they can be taken less seriously.

Support parents in their right to just be parents. Let teachers teach, let doctors treat, and let parents just be nearby and help their child feel protected, loved and happy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Today we are witnessing a generation with a new view of parenting who, driven by changes taking place in society, are rethinking existing attitudes. While this may be progressive, the blurring of ideas about the “right” and “wrong” aspects of child-rearing significantly increases the parenting burden and, with it, levels of anxiety among modern parents.
- Parenting is no longer a synonym for matrimony; it is becoming a more conscious step. Parents are balancing between a search for personal space, an attempt to keep up with the trends of child-rearing and treating child development as a project.
- Isolation caused by the coronavirus pandemic required parents to engage more in the educational process. This has raised questions about the role and responsibility of parents vs. institutions and caused a pushback from overloaded parents who are distancing themselves.
- Brands can help to reduce parents' anxiety by focusing on the valuable things available “here and now”. Reassure them that mistakes are natural and focus on their primary objective of loving their child.