

# SIMPLICITY PARENTING

**Hannah Hiles** starts the first of a series of columns on seminal parenting books with a chance to get to know **Kim John Payne**, who recommends you simply do less!

**MANY PARENTS FEEL OVERWHELMED** by the fast pace of modern life and long for the simpler days of their own childhood.

Kim John Payne's book *Simplicity Parenting: Using The Extraordinary Power Of Less To Raise Calmer, Happier And More Secure Kids* has been inspiring parents to slow down family life since it was published in 2010.

Australian-born Kim has been an educator, consultant, researcher and family counsellor for almost 30 years, and aims to give parents practical ideas for small but effective changes.

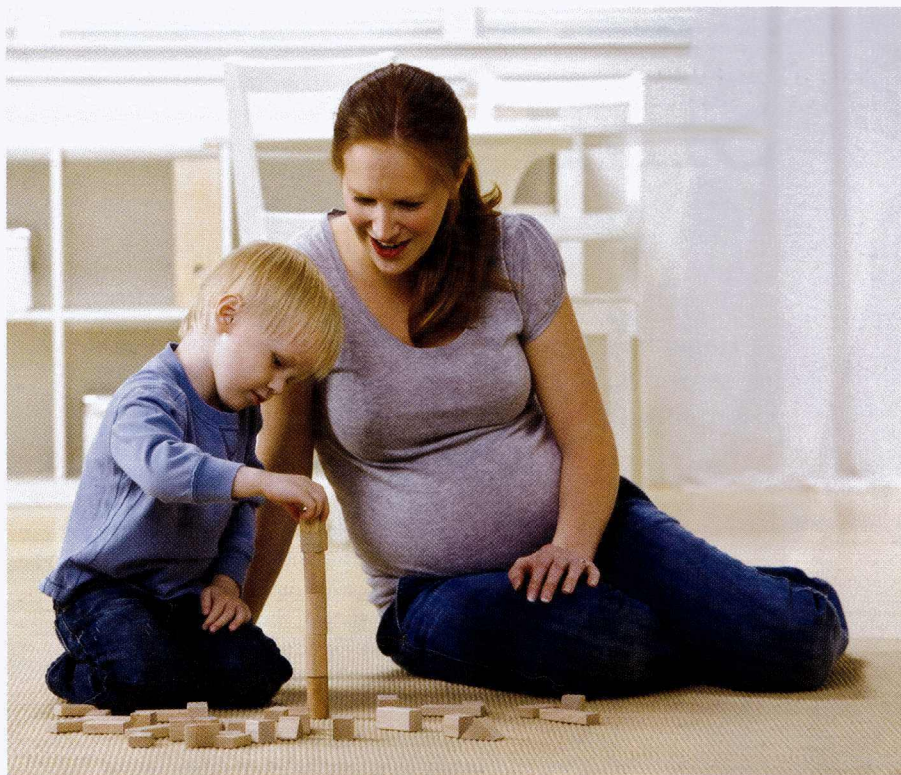
Now based in the US with his wife and two children, he tells Hannah more about the Simplicity Parenting philosophy.

**How did you come to recognise the dangers of "too much stuff, too many choices and too little time"?**

When I returned from working in refugee camps in South-East Asia I was struck by the similarly stressed-looking children here in the west. These kids were from "typical" families yet they looked like wartime kids. The same nervousness, fight or flight reactions, over-controlling behaviour. It led me to feel that we are living in the undeclared war on childhood.

**In *Simplicity Parenting* you talk about simplifying the child's home environment, establishing rhythms and rituals in daily life, reducing scheduled activities and filtering out the adult world. Where would you recommend that a parent should start?**

The great thing about *Simplicity Parenting* is that a parent can make small do-able changes that will fit naturally in their >



## 'The interesting thing about having fewer toys is that the kids play better. This is because when there is less stuff the kids need to get creative'

> family. As one parent said: "I was so burnt out on parenting books that always left me with the feeling that I had to do and learn a ton of stuff. This is the only book I know where you don't have to do anything more, but simply do less. I can do that."

Many parents choose to start with their child's environment and feel a sense of elation when they have begun decluttering a kid's toys, books and clothes. This tends to give a child a feeling of order and space. The interesting thing about having fewer toys is that the kids play better. This is because when there is less stuff the kids need to get creative. Getting creative triggers the collaborative centres of the brain, which allows them to play in a better way with each other. What is rare is precious; we all know that, so fewer toys, books and clothes mean that children appreciate what they get rather than having a sense of entitlement.

One of the most memorable suggestions in *Simplicity Parenting* is the need to give our children "the gift of boredom". What does this mean, and why is it so powerful? We need to remember to allow our kids to be bored because boredom is the precursor

to creativity. When a child is constantly busy, bouncing from one thing to another, it's hard for them to know what they "want to do". By reaching for something to do, instead of always being scheduled or entertained, children can be imaginative and start building a world of their own making.

Now that the average stay in a job in the US is around three years, our kids need now more than ever to be creative and adaptable. *Simplicity Parenting* is not about going back in time, it is about raising kids for a future where they will need to be highly innovative and not passive consumers of content.

### How do you feel about the influence of screens in our children's lives?

It's important to remember that what a child sees on a screen is someone else's creativity, not their own. The Kaiser Family Foundation study in 2011 found that 8- to 18-year-olds are watching on average 7.5 hours of screen a day. That's an alarming amount of time to have someone else raising your kid with values that very likely don't always match yours. It's not that I am rampantly anti-screen, it's that I am for relating to the real world and all the things to really discover.

A parent with a young child could implement your suggestions from the start. Is it too late for parents with older children or teenagers to make these changes?

We have a lot of feedback on this because this is now a worldwide movement with around 500 *Simplicity Parenting* coaches working with families. Sensibly simplifying and balancing family life has such heart-warming effects for kids of all ages. As one mother wrote in: "When we hit the pause button and looked at what was essential and what was not I felt like I got my 12- and 14-year-old kids back again. It's kind of embarrassing how much better our relationship has become by simplifying our lives."

Teenagers are programmed to rebel against their parents but having consistency and connection at home – even simple things like regularly eating together as a family – will be hugely beneficial to them. It's never too late to bring inspiration and attention to the flow of family life.

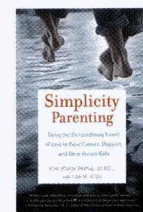
If a parent only takes away one message from your books, what should it be?

Listen to your parental instincts. Once a parent can pause and tune into their instincts, very few of us are content with the "too much, too soon, too sexy, too young" culture. The key to change is to allow these instincts a voice rather than accept the new normal of the highly stressed child.

## MORE INSPIRATION

**JOIN** Sign up for a monthly e-newsletter and free simplicity starter kit at [simplicityparenting.com](http://simplicityparenting.com)

**LEARN** For extra support you can find out more about *Simplicity Parenting* groups and coaches at [simplicityparenting.com/training-workshops](http://simplicityparenting.com/training-workshops). There are currently four trained coaches in the UK



**READ** Kim John Payne is also the co-author of *Beyond Winning: smart parenting in a toxic sports environment*, which focuses on finding ways to make children's participation in sports a more positive all-round experience.

■ Hannah is a freelance writer and mum of one who lives in Staffs. She blogs at [hannahhiles.wordpress.com](http://hannahhiles.wordpress.com)