

Anxious Generation CHAPTER 3 SUMMARY

Discover Mode and the Need for Risky Play

The human brain contains two subsystems that put it into two common modes: *discover mode* (for approaching opportunities) and *defend mode* (for defending against threats). Young people born after 1995 are more likely to be stuck in defend mode, compared to those born earlier. They are on permanent alert for threats, rather than being hungry for new experiences. They are anxious.

All children are by nature antifragile. Just as the immune system must be exposed to germs, and trees must be exposed to wind, children require exposure to setbacks, failures, shocks, and stumbles in order to develop strength and self-reliance. Overprotection interferes with this development and renders young people more likely to be fragile and fearful as adults.

Children must have a great deal of free play to develop, and they benefit from risky physical play, which is anti-phobic effects. Children seek out the level of risk and thrill that they are ready for, in order to master their fears and develop competencies. Risk-taking online may not have comparable anti-phobic effects.

In the late 1980s and especially the 1990s, parents in Anglo countries became more fearful for many reasons, including changes in the media ecosystem and news cycle. They lost trust in each other, they started spending far more time supervising their own children, and they did more parenting in defense mode, seeing risks and threats everywhere.

The worship of "safety" above all else is called safetyism. It is dangerous because it makes it harder for children to learn to care for themselves and to deal with risk, conflict, and frustration.

The attachment system evolved to help young mammals learn the skills they'll need to reach adulthood while retreating to their "secure base" when they feel threatened. Fearful parenting keeps children on home base too much, preventing them from having the experiences they need to grow and to develop a secure attachment style.

Children are most likely to thrive when they have a play-based childhood in the **real** world. They're less likely to thrive when fearful parenting and the phone-based childhood deprive them of opportunities for growth.