

Book review for Oliver James's Love Bombing: Resetting Your Child's Emotional Thermostat

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Oliver James takes a refreshing approach to raising children in a time when parents are bombarded with techniques ranging from absurd, impossible, cruel and so lofty the ideals are impossible to achieve. His 2012 book, *Love Bombing: Resetting Your Child's Emotional Thermostat* is a great read, accessible, plain speaking and compassionate. I enjoyed this book. It is not only very forgiving and supportive of families, particularly parents, and their foibles, it also gives hope. Importantly, the book also provides parents with ideas about how they can try to work through hard times and reconnect with their child/ren, maximising the opportunities for growth of the individuals within the family but also the group as a whole.

Oliver James is a British psychologist who is known for writing numerous books including the well known parenting book *How Not To F*** Them Up*. In addition he presents the themes about which he writes on radio and television. He lives with his wife and two young children in Oxfordshire.

James says "the child's problem is almost never the fault of the parents, who are only doing their best. Because of one misfortune or another, or a chain of them, the child's basic brain chemistry is in need of an adjustment, usually only a small one." These words hold much promise and suggest to the reader that anything is possible with the right "Love Bomb". To "Love Bomb" is to create an opportunity to allow a child a period of time to spend time with a particular parent (usually the primary carer who is usually the birth mother) and feel they are "completely loved and completely in control" for the duration whether it be 24, 48 or 2 hours. James believes that this method is effective whatever the social background, ethnic origin or nationality of the family as he posits that the needs of children everywhere are fundamentally the same. He believes the method works for "nearly all children from the age of 3 years to the early teens." I really loved the idea of being able to reset one's child's emotional thermostat and in doing so hopefully shift any problematic dynamics that may have developed between parent and child over time. The notion that the child's brain is still very "plastic" and can shift and grow positively is great news, news I took on enthusiastically as the mother of two young children who have already faced certain challenges in their young lives and who have already entered into certain dynamics with me that sometimes seem immovable and are not necessarily desired. At the same time, I wasn't entirely persuaded that things are never the fault of

parents nor that every child can benefit given that some families are facing extreme factors such as structural inequality, racism, poverty, and so on. I am therefore not convinced that this is all every child may need (although experiencing love bombing is unlikely to cause harm and is likely to do some good, albeit perhaps only temporarily).

The individual stories in the book were fantastic in affording the reader a view into a range of individual and family circumstances to which one may relate and from which one may learn. The examples that James presents include very successful “Love Bombing” episodes and those that had some effect but did not completely fulfil the original aim. Overall the unique family stories were full of hope and positivity. I had the sense that James is very focussed on assisting families to see there is always hope and opportunity for connection between family members thereby creating change.

Different stories will leap out at the reader, whether because they identify with the parent, the child or some other aspect of the story and this is both moving and useful as it's possible the reader can glean ideas and learn from the examples. Some of the stories that resonated with me were “perfectionist” Mark's tale, which brought a tear to my eye at certain points, as did the description of the young foodie Mary. Most parents aim to provide the best circumstances for the optimum development of their children yet parenting is a hard job, full of great joy but also plenty of low moments. Understanding that there may be strategies to enable change from very “stuck” family positions is the strong message being delivered by this book via James' compassionate voice. Deirdre, the mother of Paddy sums things up well: “The great fear is that you have done damage and there's no way to repair it. I am convinced nothing is necessarily permanent. You end up saying ‘don't’, ‘stop’ all the time. LB offers a way to change the pattern from just crowd control. If you are not careful, you turn into a parental bureaucracy.”

Love Bombing: Reset Your Child's Emotional Thermostat was a great read. It presents a simplistic theory in some ways but at its best one that can be used to create great change and at it's worst unlikely to cause harm. I commend it to any parent seeking out a guilt free, practical and kind parenting read! Psychotherapists and counsellors can add this to their book shelf as a psycho-educational text for parents struggling with children acting out.

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