

Praise for *How We Thrive*

“*How We Thrive* is such an important book right now—it’s a reminder to get off your phone, get out there, notice, play, and have fun. You can start wherever it draws you in and makes you want to try something—by yourself, with your family, or with friends! But most of all, the message is clear—to thrive you must continue to look in new directions.”

—**Carole Basile**, dean of the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation at Arizona State University

“In *How We Thrive*, readers will find a wealth of resources to support them when they feel overtapped, overworked, overstimulated, and overwrought. Stephanie Malia Krauss draws on her Hawaiian heritage to guide readers into a more humane life while backing her suggestions with research. The author includes practices that help a family opt out of the relentless pressures created by modern technology. Instead, she asks readers to establish values that prioritize being in tune with our bodies, forming in-person relationships, and caring for one another in our communities. The writing is generous and actionable.”

—**Julie Bogart**, author of *The Brave Learner* and founder of Brave Writer

“*How We Thrive* skips the empty platitudes so many parents and professionals are given, as if a catch phrase can help us right now. Instead, this is parenting advice rooted in science and experience so that we and our kids can actually navigate and thrive amid the plethora of issues that did not exist in the past.”

—**Shannon Carpenter**, author of *The Ultimate Stay-at-Home Dad*

“*How We Thrive* is a modern user’s manual for ourselves as caregivers. The author offers us comprehensive insights into caring and keeping ourselves healthy in a challenging world with great compassion and a realization of how hard it is to be human. We need this highly readable reference manual of the heart, mind, and spirit for everyone who works with kids. I highly recommend *How We Thrive!*”

—**Hunter Clark-Fields**, author, *Raising Good Humans*; host, the Mindful Mama Podcast

“For those of us devoted to the camp movement, this book feels like coming home. Stephanie Malia Krauss reminds us that play, rest, connection, creativity, contribution, and belonging are not luxuries. They are the conditions under which children—and adults—grow strong, joyful, and resilient. I encourage every educator, parent, and youth-development professional to read this book and draw from the simple, powerful truths it contains to help our children thrive.”

—**Henry DeHart**, CEO, American Camp Association

“In *How We Thrive*, Stephanie Malia Krauss invites us to reimagine what it means to be fully human. With clarity and heart, she challenges us to reclaim the essentials of our lives—those basic human needs so often overlooked in our homes, schools, and workplaces. This is more than a guide to thriving—it is a call to rehumanize our world, to meet life’s storms with courage, and to tap into the enduring power that has allowed humanity to endure and rise above for generations. What starts as a book about thriving becomes a manifesto for embracing our full humanity.”

—**Shawn Ginwright**, author of *The Four Pivots*; Jerome T. Murphy
Professor of Practice, Harvard University; CEO of Flourish Agenda

“Our students, parents, and communities know that afterschool and summer programs are a necessity because they keep kids safe, support working parents, and inspire learning. Stephanie Malia Krauss provides evidence that demonstrates why holistic programs are so effective. The play, creativity, connection, and purpose we build into quality programs are backed by decades of research. *How We Thrive* gives every adult working with young people a powerful framework for creating the conditions where kids thrive now and into the future. It also arms advocates with research to make the case for more of our children to have access to these essential programs.”

—**Jodi Grant**, executive director,
Afterschool Alliance

“In this beautifully illustrated volume, Stephanie Malia Krauss blends cutting-edge research with holistic wisdom to show how kids and the adults who care for them can thrive in a complex world—even with its rough and unpredictable conditions. Grounded in neuroscience and practical insights, the book shares strategies for calming overwhelm, building connections, and fostering purpose. Through her focus on collective care, Stephanie Malia Krauss reminds us that when caregivers are supported, kids flourish too.”

—**Devorah Heitner**,
author of *Growing Up in Public* and *Screenwise*

“Understanding how and why kids feel their big feelings helps us understand why they act with their big actions. Caregivers and educators who understand the ‘why’ are better able to raise and teach kids who thrive in the face of challenges while also finding new ways to care for themselves. Stephanie Malia Krauss has provided an essential guide that links the how and the why in a useful and comprehensive way, so we and our kids are better able to navigate life and adapt to challenges and change.

—**Jessica Lahey**, author of *New York Times* bestselling book
The Gift of Failure and of *The Addiction Inoculation*

“In a world that feels like it’s moving too fast for all of us, *How We Thrive* offers calm, actionable wisdom. Stephanie Malia Krauss shows how everyday choices—more rest, more play, more connection, more flow—can help kids (and us) feel grounded and grow stronger. This is an essential science-based book for adults who want to support kids and each other in these complicated times.”

—**Melinda Wenner Moyer**,
author of *Hello, Cruel World!*

“*How We Thrive* is exactly the book we need right now—a gentle, grounding guide for parents and others caring for kids who are trying to stay steady in an unsteady world. With her trademark calm and clarity, Stephanie Malia Krauss offers a roadmap for tending to ourselves so we can meaningfully show up for our kids. It’s a deeply human, holistic reminder that we matter, too.”

—**Debbie Reber**, CEO and founder of Tilt Parenting;
author of *Differently Wired*

“At a time of rapid change, social isolation, uncertainty, and overwhelm, Stephanie Malia Krauss has waded deep into the waters of what ails us as humans and offers a rich, deeply researched, and hopeful guide to ‘rehuman’ our lives, families, schools, workplaces, and communities. Filled with practical resources and actionable strategies, *How We Thrive* is an essential book. It belongs on desks and nightstands everywhere.”

—**Brigid Schulte**, award-winning journalist; author of *Over Work: Transforming the Daily Grind in the Quest for a Better Life* and the *New York Times* bestselling *Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time*; director of The Better Life Lab at New America

“*How We Thrive* is a must-read, must-do, and must-share for parents and professionals who care for children. Based on personal experience and professional wisdom, this book is full of nuggets from the author and many family health experts. This riveting read will help us and children, our most precious asset, to thrive. I highly recommend this essential guidebook.”

—**William Sears, MD**, pediatrician and
author of *The Sears Baby Book* and *The Healthy Brain Book*

“*How We Thrive* is a guidebook for weathering the storms of modern life, reminding us that when we care for ourselves, we teach children how to flourish.”

—**Dorian Traube**, Neidorff Family and
Centene Corporation Dean of the Brown School
at Washington University in St. Louis

“Stephanie Malia Krauss’s new book, *How We Thrive*, offers a compelling whole child framework for supporting body, mind, heart, and spirit. It’s a timely contribution, especially in the Age of AI, and offers a vision for ‘rehumaning’ our lives by protecting and prioritizing the human essentials. In a world defined by constant change and disruption, Krauss moves beyond the traditional focus on resilience to explore what it truly means to thrive. This book provides a deeply human and practical guide for parents, educators, and mentors, showing them how to care for the young people in their lives—and themselves—by fostering skills like adaptability, agency, and a sense of purpose. It’s an essential read for anyone committed to building a brighter future for the next generation.”

—**Tom Vander Ark**, CEO, Getting Smart

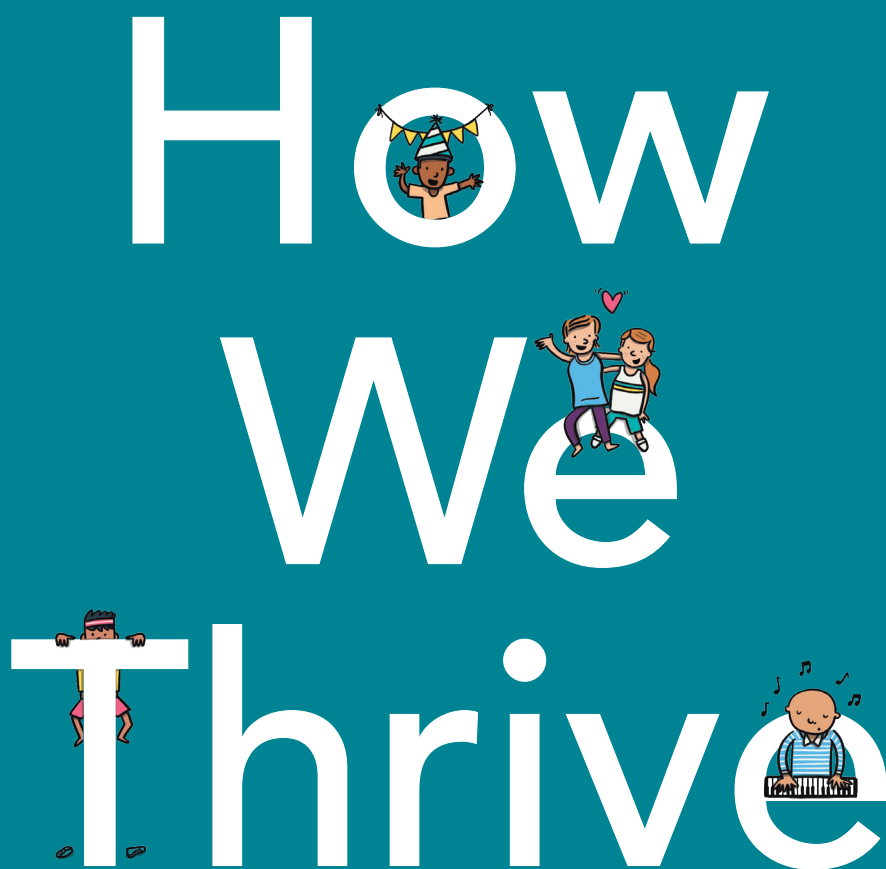
How We Thrive

The text 'How We Thrive' is written in a large, white, sans-serif font against a teal background. The word 'How' is on the top line, 'We' is on the middle line, and 'Thrive' is on the bottom line. The letter 'H' in 'How' contains a cartoon boy wearing a white party hat and holding a string of yellow and white bunting flags. The letter 'e' in 'We' contains a cartoon girl in a blue shirt and purple pants pointing towards a cartoon boy in a white shirt and purple pants who is holding a book. A small pink heart is above the boy. The letter 'T' in 'Thrive' contains a cartoon girl in a pink shirt and purple pants. The letter 'e' in 'Thrive' contains a cartoon boy in a blue striped shirt and blue pants sitting at a piano, with musical notes floating above him.

*To Justice and Koa. This book is for you. We can't control the weather,
but we can learn to navigate and live good lives.*
—Mom (Stephanie)

*For Julia. With gratitude for your love and support
that guide me forward.*
—Manuel

How We Thrive

The title 'How We Thrive' is written in large, white, sans-serif font against a teal background. The letter 'o' in 'How' contains a cartoon boy wearing a white party hat and holding up a string of yellow and white triangular bunting. The letter 'e' in 'We' contains a cartoon boy and girl standing together, with a small pink heart above them. The letter 'T' in 'Thrive' has a cartoon girl hanging from its top bar. The letter 'e' at the end of 'Thrive' contains a cartoon boy sitting at a piano keyboard with musical notes floating around him.

Caring for Kids and Ourselves
in a Changing World

Stephanie Malia Krauss

Illustrated by Manuel S. Herrera

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Visit the companion website at
www.rehumaning.com
for downloadable resources.

Note From the Publisher: The author has provided video and web content throughout the book that is available to you through QR (quick response) codes. To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand.

Videos may also be accessed at www.rehumaning.com

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Foreword

By Harrison Drew Koali'i Krauss, Age 12



Some adults think kids have it easy, and we are lucky to not deal with the responsibilities and demands of everyday life. But kids get stressed out. I know I do. My name is Harrison Krauss, and I'm Stephanie's 12-year-old son. I know firsthand how stressful life can be and how weird today's world is. I see how the overwhelm of modern life is affecting kids and adults alike.

Put yourself in a kid's position. Imagine being physically and emotionally stressed and overwhelmed, and someone comes over to you and starts talking about how easy you have it being young and how it will get harder as you grow up. Who wants to live like that, knowing it will get worse? I know I don't. I don't want to just live my life; I want to enjoy it.

It's hard for all of us right now, not just kids. That's one of the reasons my mom wrote this book. In her other books, she writes about how to help raise kids and what to do to prepare them for the world. In this book, she is trying to help both adults and kids navigate this wild world of stress and overwhelm.

My mom isn't perfect at raising kids, but she has done a great job. She also doesn't magically know everything she writes about. If there's something important that she doesn't know, she goes to an expert and talks to them until she has a great way to write about it. She spends days researching

the facts and hours figuring out the best way to explain them. She does countless interviews with teachers, camp directors, and other experts, all to make sure that what she writes is honest, correct, and, most importantly, helps people.

In this book, my mom explores these human superpowers that we are born with and have had since the Stone Age. She talks about how our minds work and how much things like creativity and play help everyone. She talks about our bodies, and how things as simple as standing up every once in a while instead of sitting can make you a healthier and all-around happier person.

One thing my mom talks about in this book is flow. I'm not going to get into it that much, but here is the basic meaning: Flow is something you feel whenever you are doing an activity you love and enjoy. That old saying "Time flies when you're having fun" is exactly that. When you experience flow, it's like you go into a whole different world.

One place where I feel flow is at sleepaway camp. You go to this camp, deep in the woods, with no technology or anything artificial. You live in a cabin, and you make fire with flint and steel. You fish, ride horses, do archery, shoot rifles, and so much more. It's like a whole different world. You're there for a week, and it goes by so fast, but it also feels like it lasts forever. Once you leave, you can't wait until next summer.

Imagine if we, as a society, weren't in "Grind Culture," constantly overwhelmed by all we have to do and everything that is happening to us. Imagine if every day we could live with the same magic that people experience in their flow spaces, like I do at camp. If we could wake up when our bodies naturally wake up and do what we need to stay healthy. If we could move, play, and be together in the ways we are meant to. Imagine if our sense of who we are wasn't impacted by what other people force us to do. Our lives have become so packed with responsibilities that we have to schedule unscheduled time.

This isn't a book about just taking care of kids; it's also about taking care of yourself. If you can't take care of yourself, that impacts how you take care of others. Let's take a random person working, for example. They have a deadline and a whole lot to do. They stay up late at night working on it but still can't finish. They decide to wake up early in the morning to get it done. They do this most days, even weekends. They aren't getting enough sleep, so they're exhausted. Sleep deprivation makes them emotionally and physically sick. Because of this, it's harder for them to get anything done. Not only are they not working as well as they should, they're not taking care of their body the way they should either. This is no way to live.

This book will help you take better care of yourself and others. Now it's time to start reading. I hope that after you turn this page, you will read from a kid's perspective as well as your own. I know you will learn things from this book, and it will impact you and people around you, making a big difference in your everyday life.

Introduction

This book started from curiosity and concern. It has ended with deep conviction. Every time I speak to a group I ask the same three questions: How are the children? How are their families? How are you? Across communities, the answers are the same: everyone is overwhelmed, stressed, and exhausted. My family and I are too. I started researching and writing this book when “burned out” became a popular response to asking about the children.

I wanted to understand what has the most positive impact on our well-being. I wondered which human capacities are most important and why so many people feel overwhelmed. While I typically write about the future, this time I started with the past.

Humans (*Homo sapiens*) have been around for about 300,000 years. We were foragers who became farmers. Then, 300 years ago, the Industrial Revolution changed how we lived, learned, and worked. The steam engine was invented, and people moved from the country to the city, from farms to factories. Life picked up speed and priorities shifted from who we are and how we live to what we can make and do. Industrialization defines today’s world, but it only represents 1 percent of human history. This frantic and productivity-obsessed life was not how we lived for 99 percent of our past.

The farther we get from our roots, the less we prioritize the human powers we are born with—what I call “evolutionary essentials.” Modern life can deprioritize or even deny these foundational assets. Modernity has brought incredible advantages and conveniences, but they have come at a cost. There are universal experiences in modern life, “dangerous weather conditions,” that make everything far more challenging than it should be.

We may not be able to control the weather, but we can prepare for it. In Part 1: Prepare for Rough Weather, we examine these weather patterns, drawing on the latest research, investigative reporting, and stories from leading thinkers and people caring for children. These dangerous weather conditions include being overtapped, overworked, overstimulated, and overwrought. They can be devastating for people who are already struggling. With enough force, this weather can become disastrous, bringing us to a standstill.

We need safe harbors when the weather is too rough—places to go and people to see when the storms are too strong or the damage is too much. These safe harbors are the focus of Chapter 2. We explore six that are especially important in these changing times: *people* who are human, humane, and holistic, and *places* to rest, recover, and seek refuge. Safe harbors protect us from danger and give us the space we need to repair damage and ready ourselves for what's ahead.

As we take on rough weather and seek safe harbors, we can forget that everyone isn't voyaging the same way or with the same resources. We all brace for storms, but the threats and damage are different depending on the person. Consider weather in real life: the radar may show a tornado approaching a large area, but it hits a specific place. If that place is rural with motorhomes and trailers, the risk of damage is high. If the tornado heads towards a dense city with mostly brick buildings, the risk is much lower. Or imagine we're out at sea and a thunderstorm with strong winds rolls in. If we are on a cruise ship, damage is unlikely, but that's not true if we are on a fishing boat, raft, or in the water holding onto a life preserver.

What we need depends on our external *and* internal resources. In Part 2: Protect Our Human Essentials, we explore our internal resources—essential capacities humans are born with that we have used to sustain ourselves for generations.

Part 2 is organized into four sections unpacking 14 human essentials. There are essentials of the body (eat, sleep, move, and regulate), essentials of the mind (play, wonder, flow, and create), essentials of the heart (connect, love, belong), and essentials of the spirit (celebrate, contribute, believe). Each of these chapters includes stories, science, and strategies. Unless I specify, the content applies to both children and adults.

My curiosity and concern transformed into conviction while learning more about these essentials. I spoke with more than 100 experts across many disciplines and read stacks of studies. I visited camps and schools, even the circus. Each new insight reinforced the idea that we can and should be living differently.

In the conclusion, I propose a vision for rehumaning our lives—protecting and prioritizing these human essentials, which are often restricted or ignored. These are imagined scenarios of what our homes, schools, and workplaces could be. The conclusion invites us to deal with dangerous weather and embrace our power—the natural capacities that have enabled humans to defy the odds for years. What began as a book about how we thrive became a book about how we human.

How to Read This Book

You can read *How We Thrive* from cover to cover. That is how I wrote it, and chapters naturally build on one another. Or you can pull specific chapters and read them as standalone pieces. If you read out of order, you may encounter a reference to another part of the book, but it should not compromise readability. The book is written to be read either way.

The book has incredible illustrations and sketchnotes to visualize complex concepts and bring lightness to the page. Manuel Herrera has done a masterful job making these memorable and meaningful. The sketchnotes are reference tools summarizing content we've covered. There is a graphic "map" at the end of the book to help you assess yourself and act on all we've covered.

If I were reading, I'd go from start to finish, highlighting passages and making notes in the margins. Then I would use the book as a resource to rehuman my home and work life.

If I were running a school, coaching, or in a youth development organization, I would make *How We Thrive* a book study and start by giving my team time to read it themselves before jumping into priority chapters together. Part 1 chapters include bright spots and Part 2 chapters have strategies that are ideal for discussion and implementation. If I were in a school district, I would use this book to reimagine student support services. If I were in a youth development organization, I would use it to inventory existing programs and develop new ones.

If I were teaching a college class, I would use different chapters as introductory readings for students before studying the research I write about. If I were providing clinical services, I would use the book to reflect on my patient and client care.

If I were homeschooling my kids, I would make this my go-to manual. The content aligns with leading thinkers like Maria Montessori and Loris Malaguzzi (creator of the Reggio Emilia approach) and newer voices like Peter Gray and Ainsley Arment. My big goal as a mom is that my kids have what they need to be prepared and live good lives. These navigational tools and evolutionary essentials offer a roadmap to help them do both.

Who Should Read This Book

This book is for any adult raising and working with young people. If you aren't caring for kids or if you're a young person yourself, skip what doesn't apply but know most content will.

Here is a map for how we thrive by rehumaning our lives. It is time to reclaim the essentials that have sustained us throughout time. We are powerful, incredible beings with natural power that has enabled us to survive and thrive for millennia. Dangerous weather is a risk we face, but together we can evolve, endure challenge, and enjoy our lives.

Prepare for Rough Weather



Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.

—Marie Curie

Right before the 2021–2022 school year started, I spoke to a high school in central Virginia. It was the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and staff prepared for a different beginning—one with social distancing, fears of illness, and heightened uncertainty. We met virtually. A bunch of boxes on the computer screen.

Whenever I connect with communities, I want to know how people are feeling and what’s going on. Since we weren’t in person, I used a digital polling platform to find out. Before speaking, I asked the staff three questions:

1. How are the children?
2. How are their families?
3. How are you?

Their responses generated a real-time word cloud¹ on the screen. The results told a compelling story. Young people, families, and staff seemed precariously positioned between enthusiasm for what could be, exhaustion for what had been, and fear for what might happen. The three different word clouds showed young people and adults teetering between readiness and worry. The data showed anxiety edging out excitement.

It made sense. The school was months into a doomsday scenario. Households had become homeschools overnight. Students had to log in to learn. Families were losing loved ones and jobs. Helpers were hurting and working harder than ever. The school year would start with sickness spreading and people suffering.

Today, some things are better. But times are still tough. Since I polled that school, I have asked every group I’ve spoken to those same three questions. I have years of data on how kids and adults are doing. Figure 1 shows the clear story that has emerged: we are overtapped, overworked, overstimulated, and overwrought. It is hard to human right now.

Figure 1 Example Word Clouds



How Are The Kids?



How Are You, The ADULTS?



It's like sailing in stormy weather, unsure of what will happen. We are pushed and pulled by the winds of life, the sheer force sometimes brutal. Focused on staying afloat and keeping course, we struggle to repair what needs to be fixed. It can feel like constant damage control. This is most true for voyagers on vessels broken in multiple ways. The extent of the damage and danger depends on the vessel we're on because we don't all travel the same way. Some sail on yachts in comfort, others in speed boats zipping through storms, and others on rafts or canoes that can be ruined by the waves of storms and bigger vessels. For any young traveler, these storms are real, scary, and all they've known.

We must understand the weather we are in. It will help us decide what we need to endure it. To prepare and care for ourselves. To know when to go full speed, slow down, stop, or change course. In Part 1, we examine the weather conditions of modern life and explore the "safe harbors" we need to care for ourselves and others. This journey is challenging, and we don't know how long this weather will last. We must find ways to navigate. We must protect the young people in our care. But enduring is not enough. Great navigators study the skies and seas, discovering ways to survive *and* thrive. Finding ways to focus on the essentials.



Dangerous Weather of Modern Life

1

Our species' pace of change now outstrips our ability to adapt. We are generating new problems at a new and accelerating rate and it is making us sick—physically, psychologically, socially, and environmentally. If we don't figure out how to grapple with the problem of accelerating novelty, humanity will perish, a victim of its success.

—Heather Heying and Bret Weinstein,
A Hunter-Gatherer's Guide to the 21st Century

To understand why the weather seems worse these days, I contacted Camelia Hostinar. Camelia is a stress and human development researcher and associate professor at the University of California in Davis. Camelia convinced me that our mounting feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion make sense. Modern life has stretched us to our limits. Crises are constant and compounded. We are worried about the future. Global stressors are personal, and personal stressors are plentiful. There is too much to do and not enough time.

Table 1 Common Stressors

STRESS TYPE	COMMON STRESSORS
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competing demands• Pressure to get things done• Being sick or in pain• Being tired and needing sleep• Changes and transitions• Relationship problems• Chronic conditions• Unfair and harmful treatment• Limited resources, like time and money

(Continued)

(Continued)

STRESS TYPE	COMMON STRESSORS
Family and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and caregiving demands • Household responsibilities • Family dynamics • Housing and money trouble • Loved ones who are sick and struggling • Grief and loss • Safety concerns and violence • Disasters • Unfair and harmful treatment • Little or no access to critical resources
Societal and Global	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic instability (such as inflation and market forces) • Structural oppression and suppression • Political fear and upheaval • Ideological division • Widespread health concerns and crises • Extreme weather and worsening disasters • Conflicts or fear of conflict • Technological disruptions • Information overload and disinformation
Historic and Intergenerational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inherited and persistent maltreatment • Historic trauma • Generational poverty

Any of the stressors from Table 1 can overwhelm. Especially when they occur one after the other or in combinations. Personal and global stressors collide. Historic harms intensify present pain. We are weary and worn down. Young kids are too tired to play. Teens fall asleep at school and struggle with anxiety. Young adults burn out. We struggle to keep up with life demands. Modern life is full of constant stress and mounting stressors. We need relief or things will get worse.

Society, school, and work contribute to stress rather than lessening it. Productivity is prioritized over human needs. This hustle is harmful, especially when you are having a hard time. There is pressure to show up and keep going even when you are struggling, grieving, or lacking resources. Work hard and fast, even if forces beyond your control hold you back. Then work harder. Don't fall behind. We are pushed to keep going and then pressure kids to do the same—even when we need a break or break down.

At times, you might be drowning in the overwhelm. Kids too. My son stayed home from school recently for strep throat. Instead of sleeping, he spent hours catching up on schoolwork. He worried about falling behind. Instead of resting, he was stressing. During the day, his inbox filled with emails about pending assignments and deadlines. He is only 12 and, as he said in the foreword, already feeling stressed. Young people tell me they don't want to continue at this pace for years. The demands of modern life make them sick and scared for the future. As Table 2 shows, the wear and tear of stress takes a toll, causing physiological and psychological pain. For kids, these symptoms can get in the way of healthy learning and development.²

Table 2 Common Signs of Stress³

WHERE WE FEEL IT	WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upset stomach and digestive difficulties • Headache • Dizziness • Tiredness • Trouble sleeping • Tight or tense muscles • Tight chest or chest pains • Racing heart and increased blood pressure • Itchiness from a "stress rash" (hives) • Getting sick (illness or infection)
Mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory problems • Racing thoughts • Trouble focusing

(Continued)

(Continued)

WHERE WE FEEL IT	WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad • Angry • Anxious or panicky • Restless • Moody • Overwhelmed
Spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existential dread • Exhaustion • Feeling defeated • Giving up • Loneliness • Unmotivated



Available for download at www.rehumaning.com

According to Camelia, stress piles up if it’s not managed well. If we are already stressed, new stressors make us feel worse. Too much stress makes us sick, disrupts sleep, interferes with learning and work, and negatively impacts our mood and quality of life.⁴

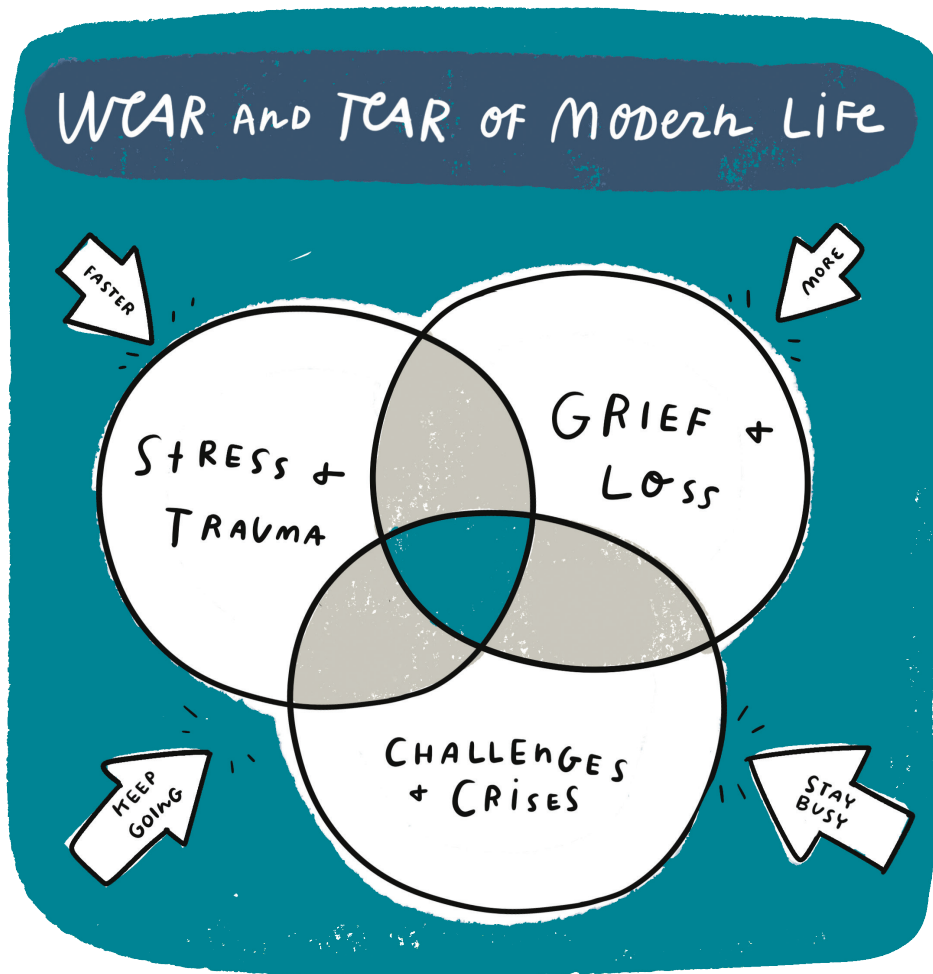
Layering multiple stressors on top of each other leads to **allostatic overload**, as shown in Figure 2. Allostatic overload occurs when challenges exceed our ability to cope. Like an engine forced to work too hard, we break down and burn out. This triggers problems in our bodies, behavior, and relationships.

Modern life is a recipe for allostatic overload. When we also have timeless troubles—like medical conditions, poverty, and abuse—it can lead to stress levels becoming toxic (“toxic stress”). This has debilitating effects on life, learning, and work. Camelia and her colleagues see stress levels rising among children and adults with no signs of slowing.⁵

When I was a teenager, I had a drinking problem. At 15, I got sober and joined a 12-step recovery program. Alcoholics Anonymous taught me to see recovery as a way of life. I had to admit I was powerless over things that made my life unmanageable. That’s the spirit of this chapter. We must acknowledge and accept that life is stressful. Unprecedented forces are harming us. They make timeless troubles worse. They create problems we have never seen before. These forces are the dangerous weather conditions of modern life:

- **Overtapped:** Resource scarcity, like not having enough time or money
- **Overworked:** Grind culture
- **Overstimulated:** Addictive and manipulative technology
- **Overwrought:** Increasing risks and instability

Figure 2 Conditions of Wear and Tear



We must learn what damage these forces are capable of. Otherwise, they will overtake us and worsen well-being. We must equip kids to do the same. These weather conditions are shaping their lives from the start. By understanding the risks of this dangerous weather, we can care for ourselves and others.

Humans (*Homo sapiens*) have been around for roughly 300,000 years. Through time, we have survived incredible odds and adapted to massive change. We have experienced joy and thrived when it's hard. We must find better ways to sustain ourselves in today's storms. In *The Age of Overwhelm: Strategies for the Long Haul*, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky says it best: "We simply can't contribute skillfully and do our best work . . . if we aren't also taking care of the place where overwhelm takes root: within ourselves."⁶

Overtapped: Resource Scarcity

If allostatic overload is being overwhelmed by stress, **resource scarcity** is being unable to meet demands with available resources. Scarcity worsens the overwhelm because we feel we have less than we need.⁷ There's not enough time in the day, money in the bank, or months in the year. The busyness of life, school, and work bogs us down, leaving us with little to spare.

Young people frequently experience time scarcity. Last year, I heard a panel of teenagers talk about their high school experiences. The common theme was not having enough time. One young woman described a daily grind that stressed me out listening. Her alarm goes off at 5 a.m. She must be on the bus by 6. Her first-period bell rings at 7:30, and she is in class until 2 p.m. After school, she has several hours of extracurricular obligations and at night she works at a fast-food restaurant or watches her younger siblings. After dinner, she does her homework, which she described as “unending” and hours long. “It's too much,” she told the room. “I think I'm burning out.” The other kids nodded in agreement. One teen asked why school lasts 10 hours a day and “like 300 days a year.”⁸ His fellow panelists did not question this gross overestimation. They wanted to know the answer.

Those high school panelists expressed a scarcity that seems shared among today's young people. I contacted *New York Times* bestselling author, psychologist, and teen expert Lisa Damour to understand. She explained, “It's not necessarily the demands on kids that are the problem. They can do the work—it's that they don't have adequate rest between periods of work.” Lisa described our internal reserves as a battery that can run low and need to recharge.⁹

Roman Krznaric, philosopher and author of *The Good Ancestor*, calls this “the tyranny of now.” School and summer schedules, personal responsibilities, and other obligations leave little space for rest and free time. Add time on digital devices and young people have longer days than we do. They wake up before they are rested, spend hours at school, and have evenings filled with various commitments and “tech time.” Their lives are often out of sync with their natural rhythms.¹⁰

Stacked Schedules and Social Jet Lag

Young people's schedules are mostly out of their control. Transportation, school, and extracurriculars operate around adult needs. This can lead to school days starting before kids are fully awake, lunch periods before they're hungry, and sports games when they should be in bed. Young people's schedules often misalign with their biorhythms—their internal clocks and bodily needs.¹¹

Let me illustrate with my children. My boys are in middle and high school. On school days, they wake up at 6:15 a.m. or earlier if they ride the bus. Their schools are overcrowded, making master scheduling a nightmare. One year my older son had lunch at 10:15 a.m. before he was hungry and my younger son had it at 1:00 p.m. when he was super hungry. Both spend hours sitting at desks and can only move with permission. After school,

they ride the bus for an hour. At night, they have various obligations like sports, homework, and chores. The boys complain about feeling drained. They experience being overtapped without energy-depleting responsibilities like caregiving or resource scarcity like unstable housing. Their experience is actual and perceived stress, but it drains them either way.

Sara Mednick, a cutting-edge cognitive scientist, sleep scholar, and author of *The Power of the Downstate*, told me young people must cope with a schedule that is biologically out of sync with their natural needs. She calls this “social jet lag.” According to Sara, humans—like animals—have natural ups and downs throughout the day: upstates and downstates. Our biggest downstate is sleep. **Downstates** are when our brains and bodies replenish resources. Many young people (and adults) are downstate deprived. Our schedules tend to misalign with our human needs. Every teacher knows the pain of needing to pee but not being able to leave the classroom. Coaches regularly miss meals because of the time it takes to prep, run, and clean up practice or a game.

As we will see in Part 2, biological rhythms and environmental circumstances are closely tied. When time scarcity combines with other types of resource scarcity—like insufficient housing, money, or food—we have even fewer reserves. In these cases, we are tapped for energy we don’t have. As a teen, there was a time when I was sleeping in cars and staying with friends. Worrying about how I would eat and where I would sleep was exhausting. Downtime felt like a luxury I couldn’t afford.

According to Sara, we must slow down regularly to recharge. This enables us to rev back up and perform our best. We get imbalanced and drained when denied downtime. In her research, Sara has proven that when people don’t get downstates, they become tired, unmotivated, struggle to learn and regulate their emotions, act out, and even feel depressed.¹²

Creating Time Oases

Journalist and author Brigid Schulte recommends “time oases.” Time oases are protected times when you and young people are freed from the demands of a grueling schedule.¹³ This past fall, our family went camping. We turned off technology and stepped away from the daily grind to connect with nature and each other. We felt time slow down and days get longer. In a short time, we felt energized and renewed. If a weekend feels out of reach, find an hour to slow down and gift yourself a downstate. Time oases don’t have to be long; they only need to be protected from the harms of the hustle.

Overworked: Grind Culture

As a classroom teacher, I ate breakfast while driving to school and lunch while students worked. I went hours without drinking water or sitting down. Afternoons were spent grading, conferencing, planning, and coaching soccer. Evenings were full of personal responsibilities and preparing for the next day. I worked from early morning to late evening. I worried it was too much, but my colleagues did the same. Busyness was a badge of honor.

Raising and working with young people is hard work, and many of us are burning out. We also expect a lot from them. It reminds me of a cartoon strip called “The Chain of Harm,” where a boss yells at a man who goes home and yells at his wife, who turns around and yells at her child, and the child goes and yells at the cat (see Figure 3 for a similar chain, related to overwork). We experience the exhaustion of overworking, but then we overwork our kids.

In the book *Over Work*, journalist and author Brigid Schulte explores the culture and history of toxic productivity in the United States. Brigid describes a culture where people work harder and longer only to fall farther behind. She calls overwork a “fact of life” in the United States,¹⁴ which I suspect is true in many countries.

According to Brigid, overwork looks different depending on what you do. People in full-time professional careers feel pressure to overextend themselves in one job, while those in hourly positions often string together multiple gigs to make enough money to get by.¹⁵ Many in youth-serving professions—like teachers, youth workers, and nurses—take on side hustles on top of full-time jobs to pay the bills. Then there is the unpaid labor of family or community life. We consider work with young people a passion or labor of love. Whether paid or unpaid, this can lead us to work to exhaustion.¹⁶

Toxic Productivity and Young People

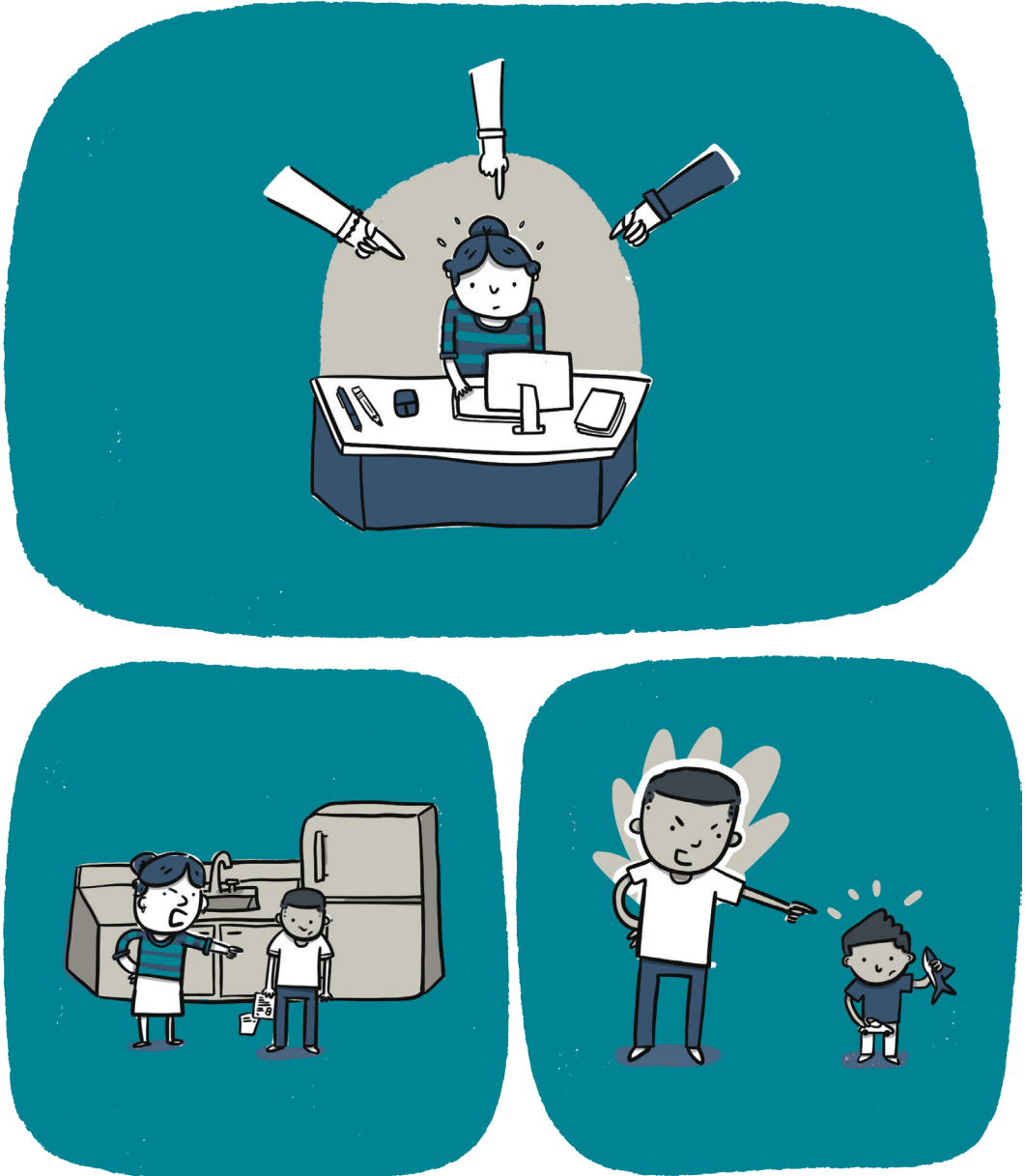
Brigid and I discussed how grind culture impacts young people as they grow up and enter adulthood. Many young people are expected to complete academic assignments outside the school day, including evenings and weekends, while sick and on break. As Brigid shared, many families in the United States think this is normal and good preparation for adult work.

Adults in the United States work more than people in other countries. We often spend more than 50 hours working each week in paid jobs. We also have unpaid labor like caregiving.¹⁷ In America, adults spend more time working than any other activity, typically six times more than the time spent with family.¹⁸ We unintentionally model extreme working conditions to our kids and signal overwork as acceptable. For example, I wrote this sentence at 5:40 p.m. on a Saturday because of an overfilled work week and sick kid.

Unfortunately, just because we know this way of working is harmful doesn't mean we can stop. The job market is volatile, and economic stress is real.

Figure 3 Chain of Overworking Harm

CHAIN OF OVERWORKING HARM



Most work arrangements are risky. They don't promise the stability, salary, and support we need to work in healthy ways. Brigid shared that working without a strong safety net comes with serious risks, which can cause us to

overwork even more. Our livelihoods and futures depend on it. We must do what's necessary to feed our families and pay the bills. Without adequate systems of support, we can be forced to overwork.

Kids are surrounded by a toxic overwork culture, which imprints on them in visible and invisible ways. They absorb the stress shocks of adults in their lives, often being on the receiving end of the negative feelings and behaviors overworking feeds.¹⁹ They contend with pressure to overperform and overwork themselves. This can make it hard for young people to distinguish between the power and pride of hard work and the damage and dangers of overwork.

In the United States, we expect young people to overwork because, for many of us, it's the only work we know. We reward them for perfect attendance and finishing assignments early. We applaud young people who take honors classes while “balancing” multiple sports. We see being busy as better than being bored.

In the meditation book *Black Liturgies*, Cole Arthur Riley writes, “We confess that we are so accustomed to pushing through an exhausted state that we come to expect the same from those nearest to us. We mirror the demands made of us and dissociate from the reality that these demands have harmed us, have left us anxious and unwell.”²⁰

Today's young people could live 100 years and have a 60-year career.²¹ Can you imagine working this hard for 60 years? For kids to sustain themselves over the long haul, work must be a place that provides wages while supporting well-being. Today's grind culture does the opposite.

Play Is the Work of Childhood

Camp Hi-Ho in Kentucky believes that play is the work of childhood. At camp, young people can do whatever they want. There are forts to build, hammocks to read on, a lake to swim in, equipment to climb on, a campus to explore, and more. With the support of highly trained staff, young people are freed from obligations and schedules and can choose to do what they want and need. Camp Director Blaine Lawrence describes Hi-Ho as a place where young people “get to be kids,” which leads to a natural ebb and flow of energy on-site, from times of high energy to campuswide calm.²² Not everyone has time or money to go to camp, but anyone can find 15 to 30 minutes to play without needing to produce something.

Overstimulated: Hooked and Harmed by Technology

Beyond resource scarcity and the pressure to produce, we also deal with technology companies demanding our attention. Many popular technologies, including social media and artificial intelligence platforms, are

designed to grab our attention and trigger addictive urges and behavior. Like slot machines, advanced algorithms and experts in behavioral psychology have created features—such as the endless scroll and reaction buttons—to keep us on and coming back.

This isn't speculation or a secret. This is manipulation science taught in packed lecture halls and bestselling books. In the widely read *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products*, Nir Eyal provides his readers with a “manipulation matrix.” It is a tool to assess how manipulative your “down-right addictive technologies,” which may be provided to “families and kids who are susceptible to manipulation,” are. The matrix labels you a facilitator, entertainer, peddler, or—devastatingly—dealer.²³

In the documentary *The Social Dilemma*, former tech executives outline the typical business model for major technology companies to maximize user engagement. One interviewee noted that companies employ persuasive technology to alter behavior, nudging us to repeat actions like logging in, posting, or checking for updates. According to Max Fisher's book *The Chaos Machine*, this has led young adults and children to become more digitally addicted than any other age group in history. Young people have spent their childhoods immersed in apps and technologies marketed to them for profit. In *The Chaos Machine*, a young person referred to this as “the biggest mistake of the modern world,” stating that his generation is “incredibly aware” of the issue and often unable to stop.²⁴

Preying on Developmental Needs of Digital Natives

The need to be on tech is intense for young people because of where they are developmentally. I spoke about this with Linda Charmaraman, a senior research scientist at Wellesley College and the founder and director of the Youth, Media, and Wellbeing Research Lab.

Linda told me about “streaks” in group chats on a popular social media platform. This is a profit tactic that keeps young people on the platform by preying on their needs to be liked and connected. Young people must keep a streak of messages going without missing a day. Linda calls this the “gamification of social media.” Young people don't want to let their friends down or lose the game, so they constantly check and post messages to stay connected. They stress over dropping the streak. It's so intense that Linda has heard of lost friendships due to losing streaks. I would get angry if my kids were sneaking onto social media. I might take their phones away or force them to power down devices without warning. Without realizing it, my desire to protect my kids from unhealthy screentime could compromise their friendships.²⁵

Like us, young people go on technology for good reasons. They are bored, curious, looking for entertainment, or needing a break. They want to create, connect, express themselves, meet new people, or follow celebrities. At other times, they go online because we tell them to. They use technology to complete schoolwork, check in with coaches, or stay busy because they finished their work early. They access the world's most manipulative and

addictive technologies for developmentally appropriate reasons or because we force them.

People respond differently to habit-forming technologies, including these technologies. Similarly, some people never smoke, socially smoke, or become chain smokers. People prone to addiction, like me, get hooked fast. This has influenced my house rules for tech time. Others are less likely to get hooked, but the pull strengthens with use. That’s because these products are designed for repeat use, like drugs.²⁶

Not all technology is designed to hook or harm us. Technology products can be lifesaving and life changing. I am writing this book on my powerful laptop. I am using an AI tool to synthesize interview insights and create citations. If I put my hand to my heart, I can feel the outline of an implantable cardiac device that monitors me for signs of a genetic condition. Even so, convenient technology is rapidly changing and can be dangerous. This is particularly true for young people due to their developmental vulnerabilities. Too many platforms are designed to be addictive and to manipulate for profit. This is a weather condition that will get worse.

Humane Technology

Yalda Uhls, a developmental psychologist and founder of the Center for Scholars & Storytellers at UCLA, imagines a world where young people can access humane and age-appropriate technology platforms and products. As she said, technology is not always the problem; it’s the toxic content and user experience. There are pioneering platforms leading the way.²⁷ For example, iCouldBe has provided virtual mentoring to young people who don’t have access to in-person mentors for more than 25 years. Their online platform connects young people with adults who share similar interests and helps them build social capital. By connecting online, they can explore career interests and strengthen stress and time management skills. With iCouldBe, young people’s data are protected, and they connect with trained human mentors in a monitored environment.

Overwrought: Intensifying Instability

Consider some of today’s headlines from several news sources:

- “World’s Oldest Man Dies Aged 112” from the BBC.
- “The Existential Choices Facing Small Island States” from the BBC.
- “What Does Trump’s Ethnic Cleansing Proposal Mean for Gaza Ceasefire Deal?” from Al Jazeera.

- “Warfare Is Breeding Deadly Superbugs. Local Scientists Are Learning Why” from the *New York Times*.
- “Global Temperatures Shattered Records in January” from the *New York Times*.

I routinely scan headlines to find the overarching story we are living through and writing for future generations. Articles describe worsening disasters, deadly diseases, political instability, and unprecedented conditions. There are scientific advances meant to keep us alive and destructive forces that could kill us.

It’s easy to fear for our lives and feel like the world is falling apart. We can’t hide from living in volatile and uncertain times, even if we ignore the news and social media. We exist in a world that historian and philosopher Yuval Noah Harari describes as “changing faster than any other time in history.”²⁸ Psychologist Lisa Damour describes it as a time with so much happening so quickly that it’s hard to metabolize it all, especially for young people.²⁹ Information overload, existential threats, and daily crises stretch our bandwidth and threaten our safety. We feel adrift and anxious, just waiting for the next bad thing to happen. It can be depleting and depressing.

Growing Up in Catastrophes

According to Yalda Uhls, a developmental psychologist and founder of the Center for Scholars & Storytellers at UCLA, young people report being overwhelmed by the constant news cycle. They are not developmentally ready to consume so much of it. And yet, news is easy to find and freely available on digital devices. Young people are inundated with disinformation from content creators and influencers. It can be challenging for them, and us, to discern what is real and who to believe. This perpetuates feelings of unease and instability.³⁰

If you’re like me, you operate with daily concern that something terrible could happen. It’s like background noise that can shift to full volume at a moment’s notice. Every day, I have a lurking fear that my kids could get shot at school. If the school calls in the middle of the day, that fear spikes, making my body tingle, my ears buzz, and my heart race.

Earlier this year, a student threatened to bring a gun to my son’s middle school. This is extra scary for us because my godson was shot at school a few years ago. When my son got home, he recounted the incident. He told me he thought he would die. He also said he hated missing gym class.

A few weeks later, my older son caught COVID-19 and spent several days in bed. At one point, I checked on him and found him staring at the ceiling. When I asked him what was wrong, he said he was afraid of dying. He explained that he knows the virus is less severe now, but he

remembers when it was worse. He said it's impossible to be sick with COVID and not think about it being deadly.

Today, the bizarre balance between the extreme and mundane is a defining feature of childhood and modern life.

Young people experience bad things at home and in the world and watch them intersect in catastrophic ways. Consider your reaction to a global outbreak, public funding cut, or harmful policy. Possible threats can overwhelm us, even if they are anticipatory but haven't actually happened—or if they have affected someone else, but you are ok.

We stress because we worry about our safety. We must navigate scary realities while offering kids protection and reassurance. Consider the teachers who reopened schools in 2021. They were expressing excitement about the school year, while many were afraid of catching or spreading a deadly virus.

In *Catastrophic Living*, Jon Kabat-Zinn, a renowned professor of medicine and expert on mindfulness and stress reduction, describes catastrophe as the “poignant enormity of our life experience. It includes crises and disasters but also all the little things that go wrong and that add up.”³¹ By this definition, young people's childhoods are often marked by catastrophe, intensified by instability and uncertainty. So are our adult lives.

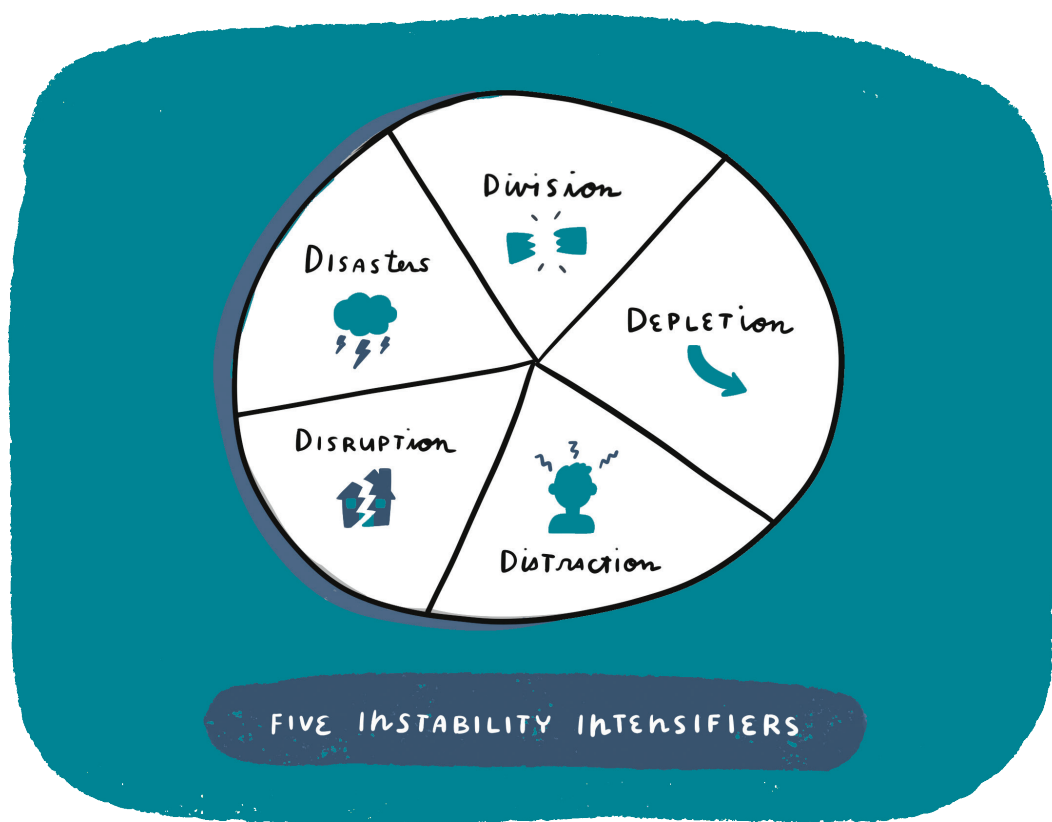
Existential Exhaustion

Catastrophic living includes the existential threats looming over our lives, like those described in Figure 4. Some young people feel these intensely. They are growing up in an era of extremes with core memories that are historic firsts. Their childhoods have dystopian and apocalyptic features. In the past few years, they have experienced the hottest year on record, space tourism, new and deadly viruses, and the rapid rise of artificial intelligence.

A few years ago, researchers surveyed 10,000 children and young adults from 10 countries and asked how they felt about one extreme: the weather. Children from every country expressed concern, with over half stating they were very worried. Three-quarters said the future frightens them, and nearly all of them said people have failed to care for the planet.³²

Young people face increasingly fraught futures and need ways to thrive in challenging conditions. Anya Kamenetz—a journalist, author, and advocate—told me that an essential part of caring for today's kids is holding space between two realities: seeing things as broken *and* beautiful. Ignoring or minimizing existential fears and global risks won't help. It will only make things harder.³³

Figure 4 Five Instability Intensifiers



Honest Reporting and Reliable Resources

My boys always enjoy *The Week Jr.* This magazine covers news from around the world. It includes book reviews, jokes, and sports. Articles are balanced and accessible, addressing tough topics effectively. It's a way for kids to learn what's happening without exposure to overly sensationalized content. *The Week Jr.* has an active youth advisory board and surveys young readers for their thoughts and views on pressing issues. This subscription is a reliable and trustworthy news source for my boys. It helps them see how national and global events impact them and that their voices matter.

Dangerous Weather of Modern Life

Writing about the overwhelm is hard. I want to downplay the forces that create damaging storms in our lives. I'm tempted to make them sound less severe. Then I remember young people's reactions when I speak. When I

present to large groups, I often have someone older who questions whether things are so bad. Later, a young person will thank me for being honest about the challenges and dangers that have defined their lives.

We owe it to ourselves and our kids to recognize these weather conditions for what they are. Acceptance and preparation will help us navigate what's ahead.

Given the generational differences I heard on the road, I asked my kids and mom to review this chapter. My mom is in her 70s and works at our local high school. When I asked them if the content felt too dark, my older son said, "Our world is unbalanced. You don't need to glam it up when you write about it. This needs to be heard. Tell the truth." My mom agreed and spent the next hour telling me how stressed and scared she and her students are at school.

It is not ok that so many people are overwhelmed, overloaded, stressed, and exhausted. This is not what it means to human. While life has always had hardships, it hasn't always felt like this. As evolutionary biologists Heather Heying and Bret Weinstein say in *A Hunter-Gatherer's Guide to the 21st Century*, "We are experiencing changes across the full spectrum of our experience: to our bodies, our diet, our sleep, and so much more. Many of these changes have come so fast and furious that we should not be surprised when they create damage that is difficult to undo."³⁴

Navigating in the Storm

I am Native Hawaiian, a descendant of wayfinders. Long ago, my ancestors crossed a vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean in double-hulled canoes guided by the stars, weather, and sea. Thousands of years later, the Polynesian Voyaging Society, under the leadership of Myron "Pinky" Thompson and his son Nainoa, worked to resurge native voyaging and navigation. At that time, Nainoa noticed a significant evolution by studying ancient navigation techniques, maps, and the modern night sky. His discovery is described in *Sea People*:

Three thousand years ago . . . The night sky had been quite different from what it is now . . . This means that star paths from these earlier periods would have been quite different from the paths that a navigator would use today and that the corresponding navigational chants—even supposing they could have survived into the modern era—would have been of little use to modern navigators.³⁵

Following this discovery, Nainoa and his team wove ancestral wisdom with modern science, developing updated ways to wayfind in today's world. This is our work. Surviving this weather and thriving on the journey requires tapping into natural resources—within ourselves and around us—that make us human. We need an updated orientation to the stars that guides us through life's challenges because past paths no longer work. The world has shifted on its axis enough that the stars—the paths that help us navigate the world—guide us in new and different ways. Let's shift our orientation so we can prepare and care for each other.³⁶

As Jon-Kabat Zinn expressed in *Full Catastrophe Living*, “When we can mobilize our inner resources to face our problems artfully, we find we are usually able to orient ourselves in such a way that we can use the pressure of the problem itself to propel us through it, just as a sailor can position a sail to make the best use of the pressure of the wind to propel the boat.”³⁷ Not everybody can mobilize their inner resources in ways they need or deserve. As we will see in Part 2, these essential resources are sometimes restricted or rejected in places where we spend time. This is especially true for kids. They can’t leave their school, home, or community—even if it’s harmful.

The next chapter explores the safe harbors we can find when we need to slow down, stop, and seek shelter. Then, in Part 2, we unpack the human essentials we need to endure and enjoy the journey. As we move forward, realize it’s all connected. People and places can provide safe harbors in multiple ways. Safe harbors offer us the people and places we need to heal.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

- Four powerful forces impact daily life, leaving us stressed and overwhelmed. These “weather conditions” exist where we live, learn, and work. They are being overtapped, overworked, overstimulated, and overwrought.
- Being overtapped is not having the resources we need—time in the day, money in the bank, months in the year—to meet demands and fulfill responsibilities. Many kids suffer from being overscheduled and overcommitted, a consequence of resource scarcity and grind culture.
- Being overworked is grind culture and constant hustle that drives us to work harder and longer while making us feel like we are falling farther behind. Kids and adults increasingly feel burned out because they are overworked.
- Being overstimulated is due to addictive and manipulative technologies that hook our attention and harm us by using advanced algorithms and behavioral psychology. Popular technology platforms are designed to trigger addictive urges and behavior. They prey on young people’s developmental vulnerabilities, including the need to be social, seek novelty, and connect with others.
- Being overwrought because of increasing risks and instability is a feature of modern life. We live in volatile times with worsening crises, including disasters, deadly diseases, political instability, and historic firsts. This creates anxiety that can spike at a moment’s notice, leaving us feeling existentially exhausted and afraid.
- Young people have been exposed to these forces from birth, which shape how they live and think about the future.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do you experience being overtapped, overworked, overstimulated, and overwrought? What is the weather in your life right now?
- What about the young people in your life? How are these forces impacting them?
- As you read this chapter, what worried you the most? What gave you hope?
- Reflect on the bright spots at the end of each weather condition. What is one bright spot you can point to in your own life?