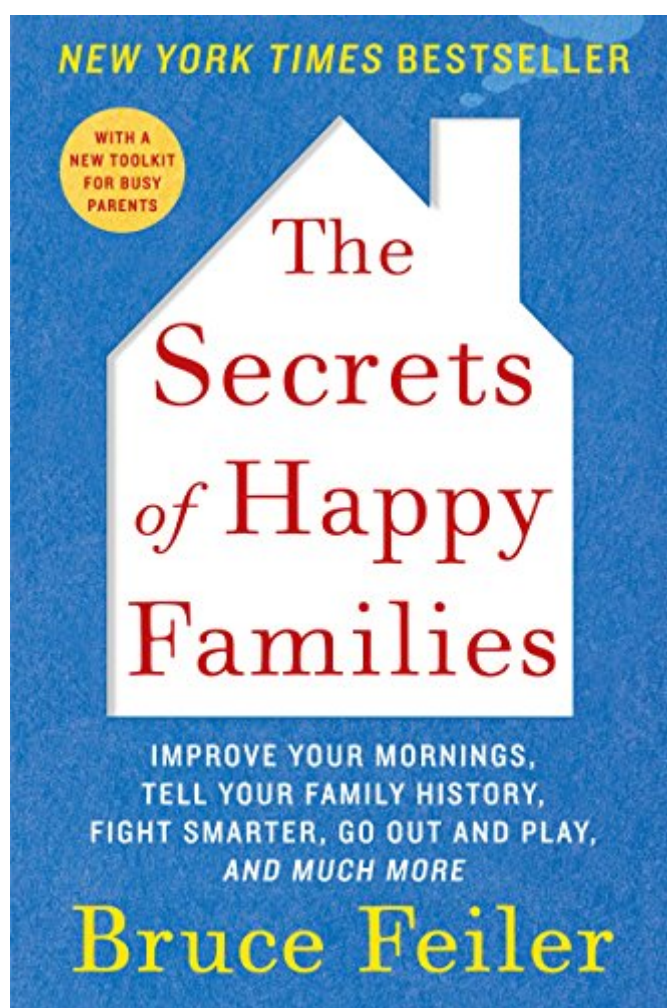


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The Secrets Of Happy Families: Improve Your Mornings, Rethink Family Dinner, Fight Smarter, Go Out And Play, And Much More



Synopsis

In *The Secrets of Happy Families*, New York Times bestselling author Bruce Feiler has drawn up a blueprint for modern families — a new approach to family dynamics, inspired by cutting-edge techniques gathered from experts in the disciplines of science, business, sports, and the military. The result is a funny and thought-provoking playbook for contemporary families, with more than 200 useful strategies, including: the right way to have family dinner, what your mother never told you about sex (but should have), and why you should always have two women present in difficult conversations. Timely, compassionate, and filled with practical tips and wise advice, Bruce Feiler's *The Secrets of Happy Families: Improve Your Mornings, Rethink Family Dinner, Fight Smarter, Go Out and Play, and Much More* should be required reading for all parents.

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Customer Reviews

The title promises to reveal "the secrets of happy families." In the Introduction, Feiler promises to tell us about "myth-shattering research from neuroscience to genetics" which has "completely reshaped our understanding of how parents should discipline their children" (p. 5). These promises are not fulfilled. The secrets are not secrets, and Feiler bases his recommendations not primarily on new

research but on popular books from the 1980s and 1990s about business (Steven Covey) and about marriage (Gary Chapman). Early on, Feiler informs us that he has no interest in speaking with actual therapists or indeed with any professional who actually works with families and children. Instead, he decides in advance that he will consult only with experts in "technology, business, sports, and the military" (p. 6). He is confident that he doesn't need to talk with people who are experts on parenting or families; "we can speak to anyone who's expert in making groups run more smoothly" and then apply their advice to the family (p. 29). OK, but that assumption overlooks a significant difference between a group of businesspeople at work and a family: namely that a family contains CHILDREN. Children are not adults. Strategies which work well with adults may not work so well with 5-year-olds. Feiler never considers this possibility. Feiler is determined not to learn anything from people who actually know something about child and adolescent development, and it shows. For example, Feiler asserts that teenage sexual behavior is "largely unchanged over the last sixty years" (p. 131). If he had bothered to consult with any of the actual experts, he would have learned how false that statement is.

With four kids, I've read (and will no doubt read) a bunch of parenting books in my time. This book really is chock-full of great ideas. Each chapter is stand-alone, so you can focus on one area that concerns your family right now. While not all of the ideas were new themselves, the way they were presented were. For example: 1) Family Meeting. First read about this in Steven Covey's book... and then in a bunch of different books by Linda and Richard Eyre. I've never heard of agility or an information radiator before, though. We had already instituted check lists for our kids in the morning and they had worked very well. I didn't know that having them check off the box would be more effective. I also, with regards to our family meeting, had never thought about asking: What went well in the family this past week? What could we do better? What things will we commit to working on in the coming week? Those three questions have really changed the effectiveness of our meetings and family. 2) Family Meals. I loved the story about Chef John Besh, and how when they couldn't manage a traditional family dinner, changed to family breakfasts... and family post-sports desserts. 3) Letting your kids help pick the consequences. Right now, we're going through a period of backtalk among my three eldest kids. I finally asked them what they thought the punishment should be for back talking? We talked about how it was rude, disrespectful, and could even hurt my feelings. Their idea was that the person had to do one extra chore for me (or their Dad) plus say five nice things (because of potential hurt feelings). I've never been told how beautiful, smart, and fabulous I am so many times. LOL Lots more in this book...

I enjoyed reading this book a lot. The author has an engaging way of writing about his family and others. Each chapter, on different topics, tells the stories of one or more families as well as talking to experts and scientists on the topic. The topics range from allowances to sex (for parents! not kids!) to fighting. It's a positive book, that will make you feel good. No preaching or dictating. One of my favorite chapters was "Agile Family Management". As a software project manager, I'm familiar with agile software development, so it made me laugh and I shared it with my co-workers. However, it's got a point - if it works for small software teams, why not families? The concepts include self-directed work (children choosing their chores from a list) and weekly checkpoints about what worked and what didn't. Overall, it's about engaging your children in the household by letting them take responsibility themselves, rather than dictating what they should do. In this way, they often end up taking on more, because they have a sense of ownership. There was another chapter I enjoyed on family vacations, as my spouse and I love to travel, and have found it more challenging with a new person with his own tastes joining our family. I also enjoyed the chapter on grandmothers and their importance - I'll be sure to share that one with my mom! Fighting smart and having difficult conversations will prove useful in both family and business life (as some of the lessons here are drawn from business writers). One of the quirkiest chapters was actually on home decorating and how it can affect family happiness. This book was full of surprises - I really never knew where the next chapter was taking me.

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