

9 Questions about *How To Be a Durable Human* – from the Parenting perspective

1. Can you first tell us how this new book differs from your earlier manifesto? Should readers check out the manifesto first?

How To Be a Durable Human is the practical application of *The Durable Human Manifesto* because it gives you specific strategies for being effective and “built to last” in body, mind, and spirit. You don’t need to read [The Manifesto](#) first, but it’s a good idea. It only takes a few minutes and the feel and images are inspiration for reading the next book and leading a mindful, healthy life!

2. What was your goal in writing this book? What do you hope happens as a result of the book's publication?

The goal of [How To Be a Durable Human](#) is to encourage each reader to cherish and take care of her or himself as an individual, unique human who cannot be duplicated (as are our smartphones which roll off the line by the millions). Each of us is a fascinating creature who is curious about the world in different ways. By being different from each other and generating new ideas our species can remain relevant in a world where machines can perform more and more of our functions. It is incumbent on us not to let anything interfere with the proper workings of our human-only assets, which include our muscles, our reasoning, and our emotions including compassion and ingenuity.

I hope to influence individuals and designers to implement what I call “durable human design,” that is, design of things and situations that actively promote humans and what they do best. There are tons of examples in the book which can be as simple as putting your iPad out of sight so your toddler will naturally play with blocks or an imaginary friend.

3. Tell us a little about your own parenting journey. I know your kids are in high school and college or beyond. How much of the ideas in the book were you thinking about when they were little? How much did parenting influence your thoughts about “durability?”

The concept for *The Durable Human* emerged from my experience as a parent. My first child was born in 1983. As a little girl, she explored constantly and had a broad sensory experience, both indoors and outdoors. It wasn’t because she was extra special (which she is!), but because there was no alternative. My third child arrived ten years later. He started out as curious as she did, but as he grew up the world changed. On 9/11 cellphones became ubiquitous. Video games and email had also arrived by then. He and I became absorbed by various sizes of screens. It took me a number of years to realize that there is an opportunity cost to our fascination with screen-based activities.

He was missing out on the wonders of the outside, for instance, a place he had been so attracted to as a little boy. I then began to realize that we need to become consciously aware of our Selves and our needs as human beings—to appreciate and use not only our muscles, our amazing senses, our emotions and all our assets as human animals which can be inadvertently dampened or dented by the way we use our tools of technology.

4. What do you think are the most important pieces of wisdom from your book for parents with babies and toddlers?

I would say that parents of babies until even up to age 5 must realize what a sacred trust and responsibility they have to allow their children to explore the world with all their senses, not just those required to swipe fingers across a screen. Kids need to have unabated time to taste, feel, smell, hear and see as much as they can of the world in order to populate their brains most densely with neural connections. In the process, kids find out what they are good at and what they like. In a child's unfettered exploration, he or she is free to discover the unique essence of his or her Self.

Kids really are wild (like the squirrels in the trees) until they plug into the digital world. Parents need to actively protect and promote a child's wild time because it will never come again. That's why there's no reason to rush into devices, as "kid-friendly" as they are marketed to be. Little kids need to know their own operating systems before they're introduced to others.

5. What do you think are the most important pieces of wisdom from your book for parents with children ages 3-10 right now?

To be very aware of how you are interacting with your child. Now is the time to look deeply into their eyes, hear everything they have to say, and to hug and encourage them as much as possible. You can see research in the book about how damaging it is for parents to be emotionally unavailable. They may not even realize how often they are checking their phones and missing the "mini-moments of childhood," in the words of Harvard research psychologist Catherine Steiner-Adair. She has seen how so many kids are "mad, sad, and lonely." On the more sunny side, other research shows what power conversation and touch have on intellectual and emotional development.

6. What do you think are the most important pieces of wisdom from your book for parents with tweens and teens right now?

Ok, so I'm going to get practical here. Sleep is very important even at this age. Devices that go beep in the night interfere with sleep. That's why devices should be charged out of earshot (and way out of reach). The habit of charging a phone away from the sleeping area ideally should start the first day a child has a device, but you can help instill the habit any time later. What we in the busy digital age must also realize is that the bedroom is a sanctuary and likely the only place a person can mentally digest the

non-stop input of the day. Everyone needs a place to recuperate and try to make sense of what you experienced.

7. What advice do you think is most important for adult people in the high-strung DC area to heed?

People in our area place a high value on productivity. I think one of the most amazing revelations in *How To Be a Durable Human* is that we can be more productive in the long run by stepping away from our work. I know that sounds counter-intuitive, but studies especially by Cal State's Larry Rosen show that our brains become saturated when we've do one or two hours of solid work, especially on a screen. We stare at it, but lose the ability to efficiently process information. Leaving the screen for just a minute or two—such as by stepping out into the sunshine—breaks the mental logjam. By taking these little breaks we can get more done over a day's time.

8. If you could go back and give your earlier self one piece of advice from this book, what would it be? What is one thing that it took you a while to figure out?

That's a great question (which is what people say when they're stumped and need a little time to think about the answer). I wish I knew earlier about the concept of opportunity cost. I would chase my poor son from screen to screen but I never explained *why* I was doing it, which became an issue between us that still resonates. I may have driven him to be secretive about using technology, mainly out of guilt. Now I'm the guilty one!

9. How can our readers follow you and where can they meet you?

I'd love them to join my email list, which they can do by popping me a note at jj@durablehuman.com. But if they go to DurableHuman.com, they can get a free download of *The Manifesto* [here](#). That will automatically put them on my list. On Twitter, I'm @Durablehuman and they can also jump into the Durable Human community on Facebook.