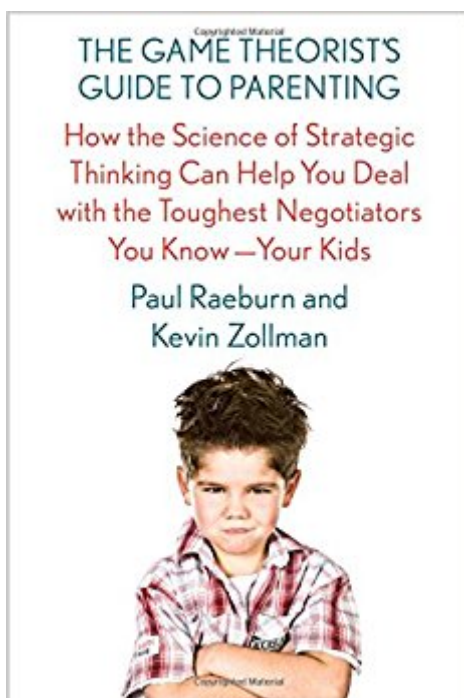


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# The Game Theorist's Guide To Parenting: How The Science Of Strategic Thinking Can Help You Deal With The Toughest Negotiators You Know--Your Kids



## Synopsis

“I absolutely loved this book, both as a parent and as a nerd.” — Jessica Lahey, author of *The Gift of Failure* As every parent knows, kids are surprisingly clever negotiators. But how can we avoid those all-too-familiar wails of “That’s not fair!” and “You can’t make me!”? In *The Game Theorist’s Guide to Parenting*, the award-winning journalist and father of five Paul Raeburn and the game theorist Kevin Zollman pair up to highlight tactics from the worlds of economics and business that can help parents break the endless cycle of quarrels and ineffective solutions. Raeburn and Zollman show that some of the same strategies successfully applied to big business deals and politics—such as the Prisoner’s Dilemma and the Ultimatum Game—can be used to solve such titanic, age-old parenting problems as dividing up toys, keeping the peace on long car rides, and sticking to homework routines. Raeburn and Zollman open each chapter with a common parenting dilemma. Then they show how carefully concocted schemes involving bargains and fair incentives can save the day. Through smart case studies of game theory in action, Raeburn and Zollman reveal how parents and children devise strategies, where those strategies go wrong, and what we can do to help raise happy and savvy kids while keeping the rest of the family happy too. Delightfully witty, refreshingly irreverent, and just a bit Machiavellian, *The Game Theorist’s Guide to Parenting* looks past the fads to offer advice you can put into action today.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Scientific American / Farrar, Straus and Giroux (April 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0374160015

ISBN-13: 978-0374160012

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 0.9 x 0.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 17 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #390,623 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #99 in *Books > Science & Math > Evolution > Game Theory* #3302 in *Books > Science & Math > Mathematics > Applied* #4859 in *Books > Parenting & Relationships > Parenting*

## Customer Reviews

“Unlike most parenting books . . . this one is based on actual research into how humans behave . . . in the home it should increase the odds that there will be less whining for all involved.” — Laura

Vanderkam, The Wall Street Journal "[Raeburn and Zollman] join a welcome trend of academics pairing up with writers (or comedians!) to create a true crossover offering, one that marries rigorous research and real scholarship with a compelling style and narrative arc that human beings actually want to read on purpose." â•Rebecca Schuman, Slate "Kids are master manipulators. They play up their charms, pit adults against one another, and engage in loud, public wailing. So itâ™s your job to keep up with them . . . The Game Theoristâ™s Guide to Parenting . . . explains how." â•Chelsea Leu, Wired "[Notes] all the ways dealing with kids might go more smoothly if only parents knew a little bit about game theory." â•Leanne Italie, Associated Press "Raeburn and Zollmanâ™s book is a bible for every parentâ•and every adult who must make decisions with his or her peers."

â•Courtney Linder, Pittsburgh City Paper "Suggests that tactics commonly used in business and economics transactionsâ•a framework of strategies known as game theoryâ•could help parents engage with their children with more confidence and success . . . [Raeburn and Zollman] offer parents a unique set of guidelines for defusing disagreements by using strategies that encourage the entire family to work together toward a common goal." â•Mindy Weisberger, Live Science "Carefully created economic approaches are given, along with incentives and bargaining to help parents successfully raise children." â•Julia Harris-Parker, Atlanta Journal-Constitution "Raeburn and Zollman put the math on the back burner and bring the commonsensicality of the theory to the fore . . . There is a fluid, natural feel to the authors' examples . . . Tantalizing perspectives on cultivating sharing, honesty, and cooperation via game theory."

â•Kirkus Reviews (starred review) "Of the many parenting books on the market, it's fair to say only one invokes vampire bats and the Doomsday Machine. Not that The Game Theorist's Guide to Parenting is all bloodsucking and mutually assured destruction: It uses strategic thinking and science to help parents navigate such dreaded children's chestnuts as 'He started it!' and 'Are you saying you don't believe me?' . . . The advice they offer is grounded in realityâ•if derived from unexpected sources." â•Mike Doherty, Maclean's "Practical win-win parenting methods that teach kids about human nature, negotiation, and cooperation." â•Modern Dads Podcast "With a light touch and sure-footed mastery of both child-rearing and economics, Raeburn and Zollman bring humor and verve to a serious subject: How to negotiate with your kids in a way that will leave everyone . . . well, not happy, exactly, but with a sense of being treated fairly and with mutual respect. Read it and count on fewer fights at the dinner table, the TV room, and the back seat of the car!" â•Robin Marantz Henig, Contributing Writer, The New York Times Magazine; coauthor, with Samantha Henig, of Twentysomething "The small transactions of parentingâ•sharing, dividing, collaborating and compromisingâ•are fraught with peril. Solutions that feel fair are not always just, particularly in

the eyes of our children. Paul Raeburn and Kevin Zollman achieve two incredible feats in *The Game Theorist's Guide to Parenting*: they helped me find a way to be fair and just in my parenting while teaching me the basics of game theory. I absolutely loved this book, both as a parent, and as a nerd." • Jessica Lahey, author of the New York Times bestseller *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed* "The Game Theorist's Guide to Parenting will teach you useful strategies from the world of game theory to add to your parenting repertoire. Even game theorists will marvel at Raeburn and Zollman's ability to elucidate deep ideas and turn them into practical rules of thumb for raising children. Humorous, informative, and practical • you should even let your kids read it!" • Scott E. Page, Leonid Hurwicz Collegiate Professor of Complex Systems, Political Science, and Economics at the University of Michigan

Paul Raeburn is the award-winning author of several books, including *Do Fathers Matter?*, a National Parenting Publications Gold Medal winner and a Mom's Choice Award winner, and *Acquainted with the Night*, a memoir of raising children with mental illness. His articles have appeared in *Discover*, *The Huffington Post*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Scientific American*, and *Psychology Today*, among many others. He lives in New York City. Kevin Zollman is a game theorist and an associate professor of philosophy at Carnegie Mellon University. His work has been covered in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *Scientific American*, and elsewhere.

This book explains using statistics and psychology to help you with parenting strategies. It seems others found it very engaging and I found it a dry "skimming" sort of book, and this hard to put things into practice because the ideas aren't vivid for me.

This book is fantastic. It effortlessly melds game theory and parenting into an insightful and practical book.

My sons, both new fathers, are very happy with their new abilities to navigate through conflicts with their children. Great book.

My husband really enjoyed this book and uses some of the Theories often especially with our boys.

This was so much fun, and I don't even have kids! The book beautifully explains and considers applications (to [co-]parenting) of: 1. Fair division algorithms ("I cut, you choose", adjusted

winner, balanced alternation).2. Auctions (1st & 2nd price, Dutch, and English clock).3. Of course, canonical games (ultimatum, dictator, iterated prisoner's dilemma, and so on).4. A potpourri of game theoretic concepts ([in]credible threats, punishment, reputation, pre-commitment, moral hazard, cheap talk, costly signaling, Zahavi's handicap principle, the tit-for-tat strategy).5. Nash equilibria (nicely, in terms of social conventions à la David Lewis).6. And voting theory (voting rules like plurality and Borda count, and no-go results like Arrow's theorem and the Gibbard-Satterthwaite theorem).The explanations also touch lightly, but thoughtfully, on topics ranging from behavioral economics to the evolution of morality. This is a gem, and it gets my vote for the most enjoyable gift for a game theorist that I've run into yet. ^\_^A caveat: I am indeed a game theorist, and while I do think non-game theorists may thoroughly enjoy this book (especially if they're parents) as it's certainly written in a very accessible way, I'm well aware that a good part of my enjoyment in it stems from seeing thoughtful and playful applications of concepts that I happen to be familiar with.

This thought-provoking little book provides a lively, example-filled introduction to the basics of game theory. Engagingly written and conceptually solid, it surveys the perils of parenting, ably demonstrating theory's relevance to an essential domain of practice. It might well have been titled, not "The Game Theorist's Guide to Parenting," but "The Parent's Guide to Game-Theory," but that's a quibble: game theorists can use it to enhance their parenting, parents can use it to better understand game theory, and people with neither background can simply enjoy it while learning about both. Just one major complaint: Where was this book when I was busy messing up my kids? Highly recommended!

Nice read, but it focuses too much on the idea of punishments and rewards. There are more and more parents trying not to use this approach, yet the book seems to completely overlook that. I understand that, essentially, the point of using GT in everyday behavior, including with kids, is to increase the cost of the other player (the kid) if she chooses a strategy we don't prefer. As parents, we have the possibility to do that (most of the times). I would have framed it more in these terms and it's possible without regarding this as punishments. Nevertheless, it's useful to have notions of GT as a parent, so well done to the authors.

Parenting books are a dime a dozen, most of them written badly and verbosely. Compared to the usual dreck, The Game Theorist's Guide To Parenting is a breath of fresh air. It's short, to the point,

and of course, uses math. The math seems all correct as far as I can tell. The disappointing thing for me is that I already knew most of what this book covered, including the various auction systems. While they're interesting, the use cases for the various auction technologies available for parenting are really limited, and the examples they provide are really contrived. Where the book pays for itself are the chapters on strategic voting and how voting systems can be gamed. My own kids aren't old enough to play those games yet, but I'm sure that'll happen sooner or later. The book's big problem is that most of the examples are either contrived or would yield to simpler solutions. There's an example of two kids fighting over who gets to play a new video game system first. The answer seems pretty obvious: make them bid with time (i.e., whoever plays first would play for less time), but the book ignores that and uses this example to go into Solomon's adjudication of the two mothers claiming the same baby. Similarly, later on there's an example about a boy who persuades his parents to get a cat, but of course ends up leaving the cat care and training to his parents within a short period of time. The solution should be obvious: getting a cat is an ongoing contract, so extracting a promise up front is useless. You have to design systems where by cat care is incentivized through ongoing penalties. The authors ignore that and get into the Nash equilibrium without ever coming up with a good solution. Having said that, the book is so short that it's still worth a read and who knows, maybe the ideas presented will eventually be useful. Mildly recommended.

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