Delve Deeper into Tough Love
A film by Stephanie Wang-Breal

This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Erica Bess, Susan Conlon, and Hanna Lee of the Princeton Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary Tough Love.

What makes a good parent? How do you prove you are responsible after you’ve been deemed unfit? Having lost custody of their children to Child Protective Services, two parents — one in New York City and one in Seattle — fight to win back the trust of the courts and reunite their families in Stephanie Wang-Breal’s moving film. Acknowledging their past parenting mistakes due to poverty, poor choices and addiction, both Hannah and Patrick contend with a complex bureaucracy to prove they deserve a second chance. A co-production with the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM).

ADULT NONFICTION

Bridge, Andrew. Hope’s Boy. New York: Hyperion, 2008. Despite living as a young boy amidst extreme poverty and tragedy, Bridge adored his mother, and she equally adored him. When her mental health began to decline, authorities dragged him away from her and placed him with a loveless foster care family. To survive his new reality and endless yearning to be reunited with his mother, he immersed himself in academics, where high achievement seemed to be a way out.

Gerstenzang, Sarah. Another Mother: Co-Parenting with the Foster Care System. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007. One night after midnight social workers brought a baby girl to the author’s home, and her life as a foster mother began. A social worker herself, Gerstenzang discovered that raising Cecilia, despite all the personal joys, would be a complex and frustrating process of “co-parenting” with the foster care system in New York City.

Guggenheim, Martin. What’s Wrong with Children’s Rights. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. "Children’s rights:" the phrase has been a legal battle cry for twenty-five years. But as this provocative book by a nationally renowned expert on children’s legal standing argues, it is neither possible nor desirable to isolate children from the interests of their parents, or those of society as a whole. From foster care to adoption to visitation rights and beyond, Martin Guggenheim offers a trenchant analysis of the most significant debates in the children’s rights movement, particularly those that treat children’s interests as antagonistic to those of their parents.

Kozol, Jonathan. Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-Five Years Among the Poorest Children in America. New York: Crown, 2012. In a follow-up to the stories he shared in his previous books, Rachel and Her Children and Amazing Grace, Kozol shares how the journeys of children who grew up in the South Bronx have progressed over the years, and the role that social policy has played in contributing to their ability - or lack thereof - to overcome the most difficult of circumstances.


Reich, Jennifer A. Fixing Families: Parents, Power, and the Child Welfare System. New York: Routledge, 2005. The author looks inside the Child Protective Services for an in-depth look at the entire organization. Following families from the beginning of a case to its discharge, Reich shows how parents negotiate with the state for custody of their children, and how being held accountable to the state affects a family.

Roberts, Dorothy. Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare. New York: Basic Civitas, 2011. Using conversations with mothers battling the Chicago child welfare system for custody of their children, along with national data, Roberts levels a powerful indictment of racial disparities in foster care and a moving story of the women and children who earn our respect in their first to keep their families intact.

ADULT FICTION

Hatvany, Amy. Best Kept Secret. New York: Washington Square Press, 2011. Cadence seemed to have it all in terms of career and family life. But when her divorce from her husband is finalized, she begins to rely too heavily on alcohol to dull her pain. Things quickly spiral out of control to the point at which she loses custody of her son. She must figure out a way to come back from the depths of her despair to maintain sobriety and fight for the right to care for her son once again.

McEwan, Ian. The Children Act. New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2014. Fiona Maye is a successful High Court Judge in London, ruling on some of the most complex family court cases in her field. While her personal life hangs in the balance, she immerses herself in a case involving the welfare of a 17-year old cancer patient who, along with his parents, wishes to forgo
Delve Deeper into Tough Love
A film by Stephanie Wang-Breal

Lifesaving medical treatment because it conflicts with religious beliefs.


NONFICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Bryfonski, Dedria. Child Custody. Farmington Hills: Greenhaven Press, 2011. This volume in the "Opposing Viewpoints" series explores the topics relating to child custody by presenting varied expert opinions that examine many of the different aspects that comprise these issues.

Hudson, David L. Child Custody Issues. New York: Chelsea House, 2013. Part of the "Point-counterpoint" series, this title, three major areas of controversy in child custody are examined: the viability of the "best interest of the child" standard; the rights of custodial and noncustodial parents; and the impact of race in child custody proceedings.

Nelson, Julie. Families Change: A Book for Children Experiencing Termination of Parental Rights. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2006. Sometimes families change, whether a new baby is born, a parent remarries, or a child is placed into foster care. It is important for children to know that their situation is not their fault, and that they can love their new families while still appreciating and valuing their old families.

FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Clements, Bruce. What Erika Wants. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005. Erika, caught in the middle of a custody battle, finds herself with her own court-appointed lawyer. With her lawyer's help, Erika realizes her parents' lives are not her responsibility, and realizes that while she can't make everyone happy, she can, with help, control her future.

Kadohata, Cynthia. Outside Beauty. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2009. Thirteen-year-old Shelby and her three sisters must go to live with their respective fathers while their mother, who has trained them to rely on their looks, recovers from a car accident that scarred her face.

Karst, Patrice. The Invisible String. Marina del Rey, CA: DeVorss Publications, 2000. During a scary storm, twins Jeremy and Liza look for comfort from their mom and learn about the Invisible String, which ensures that loved ones are always connected and are never alone, no matter how far away they may be from each other.

Stein, Garth. The Art of Racing in the Rain. New York: HarperCollins, 2008. (This edition is an adaptation for young readers.) Nearing the end of his life, Enzo, a dog with a philosopher's soul, tries to bring together the family, pulled apart by a three-year custody battle between daughter Zoe's maternal grandparents and her father Denny, a racecar driver.