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Little Crazy Children are Jangling the Keys of the Kingdom

Richard P. Sinay

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by Richard P. Sinay

Genre: Self Help/Psychology

Key Takeaways

• Richard P. Sinay writes from the perspective of a father and grandfather estranged from his adult children, combining personal testimony with research and advice aimed at both people who estrange relatives and those who are estranged.

• The book portrays estrangement as a painful, often hidden experience that can bring grief, shame, anger, sleeplessness, isolation, and a sense of powerlessness; Sinay encourages readers to recognize these reactions and seek support.

• Sinay argues that estrangement cannot always be explained by parental behavior alone: temperament, family history, divorce, distance, peers, cultural change, and individual choices may also shape family ruptures.

• The book distinguishes between estrangement following serious harm—such as abuse, neglect, or addiction—and estrangement over conflicts the author believes might be addressed through clear communication, boundaries, mediation, or therapy.

• Sinay urges people initiating estrangement, when it is safe and appropriate, to explain their concerns rather than leave relatives guessing, and to consider whether repair or a more limited relationship is possible.

• The author emphasizes that grandparents can contribute affection, family history, identity, practical help, and a distinctive bond with grandchildren, while acknowledging that protecting children from harmful behavior may justify limiting contact.

• For estranged parents, the book recommends self-compassion, journaling, learning about estrangement and grief, seeking professional or peer support, and building a meaningful life beyond the unresolved relationship.

• Sinay uses his own family story to illustrate how deeply parents may invest in their children and grandchildren, while also reflecting on how intensive parenting and shielding children from failure may have unintended consequences.

• The book's claims about generational narcissism and the prevalence or causes of estrangement are presented through the author's interpretation of selected sources and personal experience; they should not be treated as universal explanations or clinical conclusions.

Who Should Read This Book

This book is most useful for parents and grandparents experiencing estrangement who want a candid account of the grief, shame, anger, and uncertainty that can accompany a family cutoff. Readers may find comfort in Sinay's personal testimony, his descriptions of ambiguous loss, and his practical suggestions to journal, seek support, learn about estrangement, and build a life beyond the conflict. Adult children considering distance from a relative may also find the book useful as a reminder that silence and unexplained cutoffs can have far-reaching effects—while remembering that safety and boundaries can make no contact necessary. Readers seeking a balanced clinical guide should pair this memoir-driven argument with professional resources that explore both the reasons adult children seek distance and the experiences of estranged parents. Unlike Joshua Coleman's Rules of Estrangement, which offers a psychologist's framework for understanding and potentially repairing conflict, Sinay's book centers on one father's perspective and defense of his parenting. It is therefore best approached as personal testimony and advocacy, not as a comprehensive account of every estrangement or proof that any generation, diagnosis, or family member is to blame.

Chapter Summaries

Preface

Sinay explains that he is writing for two audiences: parents and grandparents who have been cut off, and family members who have chosen to end contact. He hopes to make the emotional consequences of estrangement visible and to share what helped him understand his own experience. He is explicit that he is not a psychologist and recommends professional support from a therapist familiar with estrangement. The preface also establishes the book's central tension: some estrangements follow serious parental misconduct and may be

necessary, while others, in Sinay's view, arise from conflicts that could have been discussed or repaired. He describes the secrecy and stigma surrounding estrangement and introduces his concern that changes in family expectations may be contributing to it. His own experience provides the book's emotional foundation, but his interpretations remain personal rather than a neutral account of every family's circumstances.

Introduction

Drawing on psychologist Joshua Coleman and Arthur Miller's The Crucible, Sinay frames estrangement as a reversal of traditional family authority: adult children increasingly set the terms of relationships, while parents feel they must continually earn acceptance. The book's title echoes Miller's phrase about children holding power during the Salem witch trials, which Sinay uses as a metaphor for what he sees as a family order turned upside down. Sinay identifies the book as both a personal account and an effort to understand forces beyond an individual parent, including family culture, personality, and social change. He recounts being estranged from his son and later his daughter, and describes how reading Coleman's work helped him stop assigning himself sole blame. He also acknowledges the limits of his account: it is his side of a painful family story, written to help readers make sense of similar experiences rather than to claim expertise.

Chapter 1: The Epidemic of Estrangement in America

Sinay presents estrangement as a widespread and underreported social problem, citing surveys and articles that estimate substantial numbers of Americans have experienced a family cutoff. He notes that people may hide estrangement because they fear judgment or assume others will blame them. Drawing on Coleman, he emphasizes that both abusive parents who remain connected to their children and devoted parents who are rejected can be found in family life. The chapter contrasts estrangement linked to serious harms—such as abuse or neglect—with the newer pattern Sinay believes is affecting parents he considers good or even exceptional. He also criticizes the casual use of the label “toxic” and suggests that some popular advice may encourage cutting contact without exploring other options. These claims introduce the book's argument, though the statistics and explanations are reported through the author's selected sources and do not establish one cause for estrangement.

Chapter 2: The Effects of Estrangement on the Estranged

Sinay describes estrangement as an ambiguous loss: the family members are alive, but the relationship and everyday access to them have disappeared. He recounts questioning his past parenting, struggling to sleep, experiencing distressing dreams, and feeling shame when asked about his children and grandchildren. Holidays, birthdays, and other milestones become reminders of absence, while silence from the adult child leaves the parent unable to understand what would need to change. The chapter also explores humiliation, loss of

reputation, anger, isolation, and helplessness. Sinay compares the loss to bereavement and discloses that his distress at one point included suicidal thoughts; he credits professional help and Coleman's writing with helping him cope. His account underscores the need to take such thoughts seriously and seek immediate, qualified support, rather than treating a book or self-help strategy as a substitute for care.

Chapter 3: What the Research Tells Us About the Effects of Estrangement

Using writing by therapists and other authors, Sinay connects his personal reactions with commonly reported effects of family estrangement, including sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, shame, depression, hopelessness, and grief. He highlights the concept of ambiguous loss: because the relationship has ended without the finality of death, the person left behind may struggle to find closure or a socially recognized way to mourn. The chapter also discusses the stigma that can intensify distress. Estranged parents may feel that friends and relatives presume they must have done something terrible, while the absence of a clear explanation can make the loss harder to process. Sinay presents estrangement as potentially traumatic and cites authors who characterize it as a form of abuse; these are perspectives in the literature he reviews, not a claim that every cutoff is abusive or unjustified.

Chapter 4: What I Came to Conclude About Estrangers

Sinay organizes his reflections around qualities he believes may be missing when a relative cuts off contact: forgiveness, compassion, empathy, gratitude, accountability, and a willingness to address conflict. He argues that apologies and a genuine attempt to make amends should sometimes open a path to repair, while stressing that forgiveness does not require a person to resume a relationship or accept harmful behavior. The chapter also links family conflict to people's capacity to face adversity. Sinay criticizes parenting practices that shield children from failure and speculates that a low tolerance for discomfort can make avoidance seem easier than difficult conversation. His conclusions are shaped strongly by his own experience and should be read as an argument, not a diagnosis of estranged people generally: boundaries and no-contact decisions can also be deliberate responses to harm.

Chapter 5: The Importance of Communicating a Reason(s) for Estrangement

Sinay argues that, when it is safe to do so, people ending a family relationship should explain the reasons and describe the behavior or boundary at issue. He believes an explanation can reduce speculation, give the other person a chance to understand the impact of their actions, and clarify whether there is any possibility of change or repair. He contrasts this with unexplained silence, which he experiences as especially painful and disorienting. The chapter proposes direct conversation, clear boundaries, and, where useful, family counseling or mediation as alternatives to leaving a relative without information. Its recommendation is not suitable in every circumstance: a person who faces abuse, coercion, or danger may

reasonably choose distance without engaging further.

Chapter 6: Why Grandparents Are Important for Their Grandchildren

Drawing on Coleman and his own memories, Sinay describes ways grandparents may enrich children's lives: offering affection and stability, sharing family stories and cultural identity, passing on skills and interests, and providing a different perspective from parents. He recalls learning practical lessons and family history from his own grandparents, and he describes trying to share ancestry, art, sports, reading, and everyday guidance with his grandchildren. The chapter also considers grandparents as sources of support during family conflict and as important attachment figures. Sinay worries that cutting off a grandparent may deprive a child of a loved relationship and asks parents to consider the child's bond separately from their own conflict with the older generation. At the same time, the value of grandparent relationships does not override children's safety or the need for boundaries when a grandparent's behavior is harmful.

Chapter 7: Unjustified Reasons for Being Estranged?

Sinay examines reasons for family cutoffs that he believes may be open to negotiation, including disagreements about food, discipline, gifts, comments to grandchildren, and a grandparent's involvement. He suggests that communicating expectations and seeking a compromise may be more constructive than ending contact when the underlying issue is manageable. The chapter also discusses excessive parental involvement, divorce, geographic distance, conflict with in-laws, political disagreement, and the pursuit of personal well-being as possible contributors to estrangement. Sinay argues that some family ruptures are intensified by social norms and online advice that frame relatives as “toxic.” His use of “unjustified” reflects his own judgment; the chapter's examples cannot establish how serious a conflict was in another family's experience, and an outsider may not know the full history.

Chapter 8: Justified Reasons for Being Estranged

To distinguish preventable conflicts from serious harm, Sinay lists reasons that may justify ending or limiting contact: sexual or physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, addiction, betrayal, and a parent's failure to protect a child. He draws on research summarized by Sharon Martin and others to describe how adult children may cite feeling unsafe, unsupported, disrespected, or unaccepted. The chapter also recognizes that value clashes and political conflict can make relationships feel untenable, especially when boundaries are repeatedly ignored. Sinay acknowledges that estrangement has existed across generations and that some children need distance to protect themselves from ongoing harm. This qualification is important to the book's broader argument: family connection is not an obligation that requires someone to remain in an unsafe relationship.

Chapter 9: Why Good Parents Are Not Responsible for Estrangements

Drawing on Coleman, Sinay argues that parental behavior is only one influence on how a child develops. He points to temperament, genetics, personality, peers, siblings, economic circumstances, and culture as factors that may shape behavior and family relationships. Personal examples from his extended family illustrate that siblings raised in similar environments can take very different paths, and that adoptive parents cannot control every inherited or individual trait. Sinay extends this argument to social change, intensive parenting, peer influence, and adult children's choices. He believes parents should not automatically assume sole responsibility when an adult child ends contact, especially if there was no serious abuse. The chapter can reassure readers who are blaming themselves, but its claims about the relative influence of genetics and parenting are broad; family outcomes are complex, and the book does not establish that a particular estrangement is beyond a parent's influence.

Chapter 10: The Role of Narcissism in Creating Estrangements

Sinay responds to being labeled a narcissist by discussing the difference between narcissistic traits and narcissistic personality disorder. He cites media commentary and research on generational differences to argue that some Millennials show higher levels of entitlement, self-focus, or self-presentation than earlier cohorts. He connects these traits to what he sees as a stronger emphasis on individual happiness over obligations to parents and extended family. The chapter describes characteristics commonly associated with narcissism, including grandiosity, entitlement, difficulty accepting criticism, and lack of empathy, and introduces projection as a possible way people attribute their own qualities to others. Sinay interprets his estrangement through this framework, but the chapter's generational generalizations should be approached cautiously: population-level findings do not diagnose individuals, and a family cutoff alone does not demonstrate narcissism or a personality disorder.

Chapter 11: Conclusions I Have Drawn about the Estranged

Sinay discusses what he believes estranged parents can learn about their own role in a rupture. He recommends looking for a “kernel of truth” in the adult child's complaints, considering one's own contribution, and deciding whether reconciliation is worth the compromises it may require. He also emphasizes self-compassion: a person can acknowledge mistakes without defining their entire identity by them, and can seek care and support even if their children do not offer forgiveness. The chapter turns to shame, reputation, communication, and love. Sinay describes how difficult it can be to tell others that contact with one's children has ended, and contrasts his own habit of calling his parents with what he perceives as limited contact from his children. He believes the lack of explanation compounds the pain. His reflections offer a view into the parent's experience while reminding readers that a single account cannot reveal every side of a family conflict.

Chapter 12: Generational Differences—A Shift in Family Values

Sinay uses Coleman's work to describe changes in parenting and family expectations. He argues that Baby Boomer parents often devoted substantial time and resources to children's success, sometimes becoming “helicopter” parents, while adult children may now expect parents to earn their continuing respect. He also reflects on how geographic mobility and busy lives can reduce contact and create distance or misunderstanding. The chapter contrasts Sinay's emphasis on extended family, grandparents, and family history with what he perceives as a stronger focus on the nuclear household and individual priorities among younger generations. His examples include relatives living far apart and conversations that centered on adult children's concerns. The discussion is best understood as his interpretation of cultural change rather than a universal description of any generation; families differ widely in their values, communication patterns, and reasons for setting boundaries.

Chapter 13: Why Knowing the Stages of Estrangement and Stages of Grief Are Important and Other Research

Sinay presents the familiar grief sequence of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance alongside a model of estrangement stages: shock, despair, acceptance, transformation, and maintenance. The models help him explain why a parent may move repeatedly between hope, anger, grief, and adjustment rather than experiencing a clean, linear progression. Using Tina Gilbertson's descriptions, he explains shock as the initial disbelief, despair as the recognition of powerlessness, and transformation and maintenance as adapting to life with the relationship changed or absent. He recounts continuing to send messages and gifts while hoping for a response, then gradually focusing on the life he could control. The stages are offered as a way to make sense of reactions, not as a fixed clinical timetable that every estranged person must follow.

Chapter 14: How Those Who Are Estranged Can Help Themselves

This practical chapter recommends self-compassion, affirmations, and writing as ways to process the emotional turmoil of estrangement. Sinay suggests keeping a journal, recording both painful feelings and positive memories or accomplishments, and learning about estrangement from books and articles, including work by Joshua Coleman and Tina Gilbertson. He also encourages seeking support from trusted relatives, friends, clergy, support groups, or a qualified therapist. Other suggestions include staying appropriately in touch with grandchildren, avoiding the belief that the estranged parent alone caused everything, practicing forgiveness without assuming reconciliation, and building a life beyond the conflict. Because estrangement can involve severe distress, the chapter's self-help suggestions should complement—not replace—professional care when needed.

Chapter 15: The Dramatic Effects of Estrangement on the Family

Sinay contrasts estrangement with divorce, arguing that estrangement can feel like the disappearance of the entire family relationship rather than a change in its structure. He

describes losses of trust, respect, time with grandchildren, shared holidays, and the possibility of being present for important milestones. The chapter presents these losses as consequences that can affect more than the person who initiates or receives the cutoff. Sinay urges family members who hope to reconnect to avoid remaining fixed on past mistakes and to consider whether trust and respect can be rebuilt. The discussion leads into the autobiographical section that follows, in which he explains the parenting and grandparenting efforts he believes are central to understanding his own story.

Chapter 16: How My Wife and I Worked Hard for the Success of Our Children

Sinay recounts the difficult childhoods he and his former wife experienced and the effort they made to offer their two children greater stability and opportunity. He describes his wife's work as a teacher and his own path through college and teaching, followed by years of saving, working, renovating homes, and eventually settling in Irvine so their children could attend strong schools. The chapter frames the family's material and educational progress as the result of sustained effort rather than ease. Sinay recalls sacrifices, including limited vacations and financial strain, and describes the home and school environment he believes gave the children a strong start. This autobiographical defense explains how he understands his parenting, while also representing his perspective; the children may remember the family differently.

Chapter 17: What My Wife and I Did That Made Us Good Parents

Sinay characterizes his and his former wife's approach as broadly authoritative—combining affection and structure—and describes the practical work they put into raising their children. They read to them, supported their education, helped with school assignments, celebrated birthdays and holidays, and participated in sports. Their children earned strong grades, attended selective universities, and pursued athletics, including a golf scholarship for their son. The chapter also recognizes difficulties, including the strain of balancing parenting with their marriage, their son's stubbornness and attention-related challenges, and the limits of parental control. Sinay presents their commitment as evidence that devoted parenting does not guarantee an adult child will remain close. The account illustrates the book's central distinction between a parent's intentions and the eventual choices and experiences of adult children.

Chapter 18: How Our Parenting Compared to Brené Brown's Wholehearted Parenting Manifesto

Sinay compares his parenting with principles from Brené Brown's “Wholehearted Parenting Manifesto,” including expressing love, teaching worthiness and compassion, practicing courage, showing accountability, cultivating gratitude, and making room for play and vulnerability. He believes he and his former wife succeeded in creating warmth, affection,

memorable celebrations, and a home where their children could feel loved. He also identifies areas where, in retrospect, they fell short. He thinks they overprotected their children from failure, did not sufficiently model gratitude or accountability, and may not have taught enough compassion or resilience. The comparison becomes a form of reflection as well as self-defense: Sinay argues that parental efforts mattered, but that family dynamics and social influences also shaped outcomes. His conclusions are personal and do not establish why his children chose distance.

Chapter 19: What I Did to Be a Good Grandparent

Sinay describes efforts to build close relationships with his three grandchildren despite living at a distance. He recalls traveling to see them, visiting Ireland several times, walking them to school, playing games and sports, reading with them, babysitting, and sending gifts for birthdays and holidays. He also describes visiting his daughter and granddaughter in Seattle and helping after the child's birth. The chapter frames these memories as evidence of his affection and commitment, and explains why losing contact with the grandchildren was particularly painful. Sinay also reflects on the possible losses when grandchildren are separated from a caring grandparent, especially the loss of family stories and continuity. He acknowledges that there are valid reasons to protect children from abusive grandparents, but argues that his own conflict did not warrant permanent estrangement.

Conclusion

Sinay concludes that estranged parents should not automatically take full responsibility for a cutoff, particularly when they did not commit serious harms. He attributes the phenomenon partly to intensive parenting, changing family expectations, individual choices, and what he sees as a decreased emphasis on extended-family obligations. He reiterates that parents can make mistakes and that estrangement may still result even after years of care and effort. He also warns that children who grow up without grandparents may later question the cutoff, and he worries that family patterns of shunning can repeat across generations. These predictions express the author's fears rather than a certainty. The conclusion's practical and emotional message is that estranged parents should recognize what they can and cannot control, seek support, and avoid treating their adult children's decision as proof that their entire parenting history was a failure.

Afterword

The afterword returns to Coleman's advice that people build an identity around their strengths and accomplishments, not only around suffering. Sinay suggests that estranged parents write down what they did well as parents and grandparents, and he describes the book itself as an effort to turn a painful experience into something that may help others. He also emphasizes the importance of support from friends, family, and professionals. Sinay then includes a letter he sent to his daughter-in-law describing the emotional and physical pain he and his wife felt

after losing contact with the grandchildren. The letter does not lead to reconciliation in the account provided. Its inclusion reinforces the book's central purpose: to make the pain of estrangement legible to people who may not realize its effects, while acknowledging that the author cannot control whether the family responds.

A Final Word

In the final section, Sinay reflects on the range of emotions that accompanies estrangement and quotes an online commenter who advises parents to grieve, continue living, build friendships, and invest in other sources of meaning. He says that he and his wife have adopted a pet, traveled, made friends, and supported people in need, and indicates that they have changed their estate plans after concluding that reconciliation is unlikely. The section closes on a bitter, unresolved note. Sinay expresses hope that estranged parents will find a way to move forward, but also anger at what he sees as the disregard of their pain. The ending captures the book's tension between healing and grievance: it urges readers to reclaim their lives while preserving the author's conviction that unexplained family cutoffs can inflict profound harm.

Notable Quotes

> *"“No one knows who is going to [be estranged] and who isn’t.”"*

> *"“Forgiveness doesn’t mean you turn a blind eye to being mistreated by your children or others, or you never get angry.”"*

> *"“Grandparents can provide the grandchild with an important feeling of attachment, resulting in the grandchild’s feeling more secure and loved.”"*

> *"“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view… until you climb in his skin and walk around in it.”"*

> *"“It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better.”"*

> *"“Of all the principles, I believe that experiencing gratitude and seeking support are the most important.”"*

> *"“Being happy is to stop feeling victimized and become the author of your destiny.”"*

Full Summary

Richard P. Sinay writes as a father and grandfather estranged from his adult children, hoping to speak both to parents enduring that loss and to relatives who have chosen to cut contact.

He wants estranged parents to recognize that they are not alone, and estrangers to understand the pain their decision may cause. Sinay stresses that estrangement can be justified after serious harm, including abuse, addiction, or violence. His main concern, however, is what he sees as the growing number of parents rejected for reasons that might be explained, discussed, or repaired. Although he is not a psychologist, he draws on personal experience and research, and recommends professional help from a therapist familiar with estrangement.

Sinay describes his own family rupture: he lost contact with his son and the son's family, then with his daughter. He says he has not been given clear reasons for either estrangement. Writing became a way to examine the experience, though it did not resolve it. He turns especially to psychologist Joshua Coleman, whose writing and personal experience of estrangement helped Sinay stop blaming himself for everything that had happened. Coleman's broader argument—that a child's temperament, genes, peers, culture, and circumstances can shape family relationships—supports Sinay's belief that parents are not solely responsible for every rupture. Sinay also reflects on the Baby Boom generation's intensive, "helicopter" parenting: parents devoted themselves to their children, sometimes at the cost of their marriages, without knowing that such devotion might later complicate family ties.

Coleman's observation that adult children now set more of the terms of family life provides Sinay with a metaphor from Arthur Miller's play The Crucible. In Salem, children's accusations helped turn the town upside down; John Proctor describes the children as "jangling the keys of the kingdom." Sinay uses the phrase for what he sees as a reversal of family authority, in which adult children decide whether parents may remain part of family life. He also calls his own account a "grievance story," borrowing Coleman's term for the painful habit of repeatedly revisiting a hurt. Sinay hopes that putting his story into words will help other estranged parents feel less isolated and understand that individual parenting may not explain every estrangement.

He presents estrangement as an epidemic in the United States, while acknowledging that the exact scale is difficult to establish because families often conceal it. He cites reports that 26 percent of adult children in one study were estranged from fathers, compared with 6 percent from mothers. A 2019 nationwide survey of 1,340 Americans found 27 percent estranged from a relative; reported rifts included 24 percent estranged from a parent, 14 percent from a child, and 30 percent from siblings. Other research cited in the book suggests that roughly 40 percent of Americans have experienced estrangement at some point. Sinay notes that shame and fear of judgment may mean the true numbers are higher. He contrasts long-standing estrangement after egregious parental misconduct with a newer pattern in which, he argues, even dedicated parents lose contact. He also criticizes the casual use of "toxic" to describe parents, arguing that some professionals and online advice may encourage people to sever

ties without first exploring other responses.

For Sinay, estrangement sets off a chain of painful reactions. The estranged person questions past parenting and searches for an unspoken mistake; sleeplessness and distressing dreams can follow. Shame makes ordinary conversations about children and grandchildren difficult, while embarrassment and fear of judgment can damage one's sense of reputation. Holidays, birthdays, and family milestones become reminders of absence. Sinay describes the loss as a grief for people who are still alive, compounded by having no clear explanation or closure. The estranged may feel powerless because the adult child controls contact, and anger can coexist with longing and self-doubt. Sinay discloses that, at the height of his suffering, he experienced suicidal thoughts; support from Coleman's books and seminars helped him cope. His account underlines that the pain can become severe and that people facing it should seek help rather than bear it alone.

Research discussed by Sinay echoes these experiences. Therapist Roberta Wasserman, as cited by Sharon Martin, describes estrangement as potentially traumatic, bringing sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, and shame. The loss can be "ambiguous": the loved one remains alive, but the relationship is absent and closure may never come. Martin's account also lists depression, hopelessness, stress, grief, and suicidal ideation among possible effects. Sharon Wildey calls this a frozen, continuing grief for abandoned parents and observes that families have few inherited stories or guidance for how to respond to being rejected by one's children. Sinay uses these sources to show that the distress he describes is not merely private or unusual. He also presents the claim that estrangement can resemble abuse, particularly when abandonment and silence leave a parent without explanation, though he recognizes that such a judgment does not fit cases in which separation protects someone from serious harm.

Reflecting on estrangers, Sinay argues that, when a parent has not committed serious harm, repair should at least be considered. He emphasizes forgiveness—not as excusing wrongdoing or requiring renewed contact, but as a possible route toward healing—and believes sincere apologies deserve consideration. He sees compassion and empathy as essential to understanding the suffering on both sides, and regards refusing any dialogue as morally troubling. He also stresses accountability: family conflicts may involve mistakes by more than one person, and mutual acknowledgment can make repair possible. His conclusions are personal and often sharply critical; he attributes some estrangement to what he sees as diminished respect for elders, gratitude, and resilience. Yet the practical point he returns to is that problems cannot be addressed when no one will name them or hear the other person's perspective.

Sinay therefore urges people who choose estrangement, when it is safe and appropriate, to explain their concerns. A clear account gives parents or grandparents a chance to understand, apologize, change behavior, or learn that reconciliation is not possible. Silence

instead leaves relatives guessing, fuels shame and anxiety, and forecloses mediation or family therapy. Sinay does not insist that every relationship should resume; he argues that an explanation and a chance to address the conflict are kinder than permanent banishment without discussion.

He also asks estrangers to consider what grandchildren may lose when a grandparent is excluded. Drawing on Coleman, he describes grandparents as sources of affection, security, identity, family history, and stories that connect generations. They may share interests different from a parent's, offer practical support, or provide a reassuring relationship when tensions arise at home. Sinay recalls telling a granddaughter that her artistic talent might echo that of her great-grandmother, and tracing a grandson's athletic ability through the family. As a family historian, he could have offered stories about ancestors, migration, and heritage; his own grandmother's account of losing a baby on the journey to America inspired his later research. Grandparents can also comfort grandchildren after conflict and serve as a bridge between generations. Sinay acknowledges that protecting children from harmful conduct can warrant limiting contact, but warns that ending a bond without considering its value may deprive grandchildren of love, belonging, and knowledge of their family past.

Sinay distinguishes between estrangements he considers avoidable and those that may be necessary for safety. In his view, disputes about what grandchildren are fed, how they are disciplined, what gifts they receive, or comments made to them do not automatically justify cutting off a parent or grandparent. He argues that adults can set clear expectations and discuss differences rather than treating every disagreement as proof of harm. He also acknowledges that a parent's intense involvement may leave an adult child needing distance: Baby Boomer "helicopter" parenting, though often motivated by love, could feel suffocating. But Sinay believes even these tensions may be addressed through conversation rather than permanent estrangement.

He identifies divorce as another frequent source of family rupture, especially when a parent leaves the household and the remaining spouse shapes the children's view of that parent. In-law conflicts, geographical distance, and dwindling communication can also widen divisions. Sinay links estrangement to a growing emphasis on individual happiness over family obligation, arguing that some adults see leaving a difficult relationship as preferable to working through it. He also criticizes online advice and popular therapy language that labels parents "toxic" or narcissistic on limited evidence, sometimes encouraging immediate separation. Political disagreements and disputes over a child's sexual identity or gender transition can also fracture families, though in these cases he recognizes that parents' refusal to accept a child may contribute to the rupture.

By contrast, Sinay accepts that estrangement can be justified when a parent has caused serious harm. He cites sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, neglect, addiction, betrayal,

and a failure to protect a child from abuse by someone else. He also includes cruel or persistently disrespectful treatment and a parent's refusal to accept a child. Drawing on therapist Sharon Martin's discussion of research, he notes that adult children commonly describe feeling unsupported, rejected, or harmed as reasons for cutting contact. Sinay's distinction is that serious misconduct may warrant distance, while conflicts that could be discussed or repaired should not automatically end a family bond.

Turning to estranged parents, Sinay argues that parenting alone cannot explain every rupture. Following psychologist Joshua Coleman, he points to genetics, temperament, personality, siblings, peers, economic circumstances, and culture as influences on how children develop. A stubborn or difficult temperament, he suggests, may persist despite a parent's best efforts. He illustrates this with relatives' and friends' children whose behavior, addiction, or struggles seemed beyond the reach of even devoted parenting; some were adopted, so their inherited traits were unknown to the parents. These stories support his claim that nurture does not control everything. He also recalls how peers influenced his son's choices as a teenager, arguing that social pressure can outweigh parental guidance.

Sinay sees the rise of narcissism as another force behind estrangement, while distinguishing ordinary narcissistic traits from narcissistic personality disorder. He describes narcissism as involving self-importance, entitlement, and diminished empathy, and suggests that a person who readily accuses a parent of narcissism may be projecting traits of their own. He cites research by Julia Brailovskaia and Hans-Werner Bierhoff comparing younger and older Millennials: the later-born group scored higher on narcissism, sensation-seeking, self-presentation, and social interaction on Facebook. He also refers to cultural commentary portraying Millennials as self-focused and entitled. Sinay believes this helps explain why personal fulfillment can take precedence over reconciling with parents, though he acknowledges that not every person in a generation shares the same traits.

From his experience, Sinay concludes that estranged parents should examine their own part in a conflict without accepting total blame. Coleman's idea of a "kernel of truth" in an adult child's complaint can help a parent understand what might need to change. Sinay also urges self-compassion: a person can recognize mistakes and make amends without deciding that they are unworthy of love. Shame, damaged reputation, and uncertainty about why a relationship ended can be especially painful. He describes communication as a recurring difficulty in modern families, particularly when children move far away and contact becomes sporadic. In his view, keeping a relationship alive requires both sides to communicate and take responsibility; silence leaves the estranged parent unable to understand or respond to the problem.

Sinay attributes some of this distance to changing family values across generations. He argues that families' geographic dispersal and demanding work lives have reduced contact,

while intensive parenting shifted attention away from spouses and extended relatives toward children. He also believes many younger adults prioritize their own households and material goals over family history and ties with older relatives. Parents, meanwhile, may expect closeness in return for years of care, only to find that their adult children do not share that expectation. These differences, he says, can turn misunderstandings into lasting separations.

Understanding the stages of estrangement and grief can help people recognize what is happening emotionally. Sinay describes estrangement as moving through shock, despair, acceptance, transformation, and maintenance, while grief is often described through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Neither sequence is orderly: people may revisit stages, skip some, or experience several at once. Shock brings confusion about the sudden loss; despair can include helplessness, anger, and resentment. Acceptance means acknowledging the changed reality and allowing oneself to grieve. Transformation involves letting go of repeated attempts to force reconciliation and reshaping life around the relationship as it stands. Maintenance means living with that reality, whether or not contact resumes.

To help themselves, estranged parents can practice self-compassion through daily affirmations and keep a journal to record feelings, memories, and accomplishments. Sinay recommends learning about estrangement and grief, including through Coleman’s books, and reading practical guidance on possible reconciliation. He urges parents to seek support from trusted relatives, friends, clergy, therapists, or peer groups, especially professionals familiar with estrangement. He also advises continuing to let grandchildren know they are loved, when appropriate, without making contact a demand. Rather than blaming themselves for everything, parents can acknowledge their own mistakes, forgive themselves, and consider forgiving their adult children. These steps, he suggests, can help them care for themselves while the family relationship remains unresolved.

Estrangement, Sinay argues, reaches beyond the person who is cut off and alters the whole family. Unlike divorce, which may end a marriage while leaving family members in contact, estrangement can make the family one knew seem to vanish altogether. It also damages trust and respect, which may be difficult to restore, and deprives parents and grandparents of time with adult children and grandchildren, including holidays, birthdays, and other milestones that cannot be recovered. Sinay believes that any renewed relationship requires people to look beyond past offenses and make room for love and respect again.

He then recounts how he and his former wife worked to give their children the stable, opportunity-filled childhood they had lacked. Both had grown up with financial hardship and difficult family circumstances. His wife, raised in California after her family moved from New York, worked her way through college and became a dedicated elementary-school teacher. Sinay grew up in a large family, experienced harsh physical discipline, and paid his own way

through college and graduate school while building a career as an English teacher. Their histories, he says, made them determined to provide more for their children.

That effort included years of work and sacrifice to secure a home in Irvine, where their children could attend strong schools. They bought and renovated houses, took on demanding work, and limited vacations and other spending to make their plans possible. Sinay remembers the children growing up in a neighborhood with good schools and friends, and says he never heard them complain about their childhood. This is his account of their upbringing; he acknowledges that his children might tell the story differently.

In describing their parenting, Sinay draws on psychologist Diana Baumrind's categories of authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parents. He sees himself and his former wife as authoritative: they offered affection and involvement while setting expectations and limits. They read to the children, encouraged education, helped with schoolwork, and gave them birthday and holiday traditions. Sinay coached their sports and devoted substantial time to his son's golf, which helped him win a Stanford scholarship; his daughter excelled in soccer and made her high-school varsity team. Both children earned strong grades and went on to college. Sinay recalls being available to revise papers late at night and taking on extra work to support his son's golf. He also recognizes that the parents' intense focus on their children sometimes came at the expense of their marriage.

To assess their approach, Sinay compares it with Brené Brown's Wholehearted Parenting Manifesto in Daring Greatly. He believes he and his wife conveyed love and created a home with laughter, music, play, and a sense of belonging. But he also identifies ways they fell short of Brown's ideals. They did not sufficiently teach self-compassion, gratitude, accountability, or empathy, he says, and they protected their children from failure rather than helping them learn how to face it. He sees this as part of a broader parenting pattern in which children were shielded from disappointment, sometimes leaving them less prepared for adversity. He also faults himself for not modeling or teaching enough vulnerability and for expecting that provision and encouragement would naturally produce gratitude and consideration. In his view, those lessons were not learned as he had hoped, though he concedes that parenting was imperfect and that influences beyond parents may shape adult children.

Sinay's defense of his grandparenting is grounded in specific memories. He traveled to visit his son's children after their births, then made several trips to Ireland when the family moved there, including visits devoted to caring for the children and walking them to and from school. He played games with them, took them for ice cream, read to them, played soccer and golf with them, and sent gifts for birthdays and holidays. After his daughter became pregnant, he visited her in Seattle and later spent time walking her baby around the neighborhood so his daughter could rest. He describes these efforts as expressions of love and commitment, and says losing contact with the grandchildren remains especially painful. He argues that

grandparents can offer children affection, family stories, identity, and a distinctive relationship, while accepting that contact may need to be restricted when a grandparent's conduct is harmful. In his own case, however, he believes the rupture followed a disagreement about his being omitted from a grandson's ancestry report, a conflict he considers repairable.

In the book's concluding reflections, Sinay returns to the possibility that dedicated, loving parents may nevertheless become estranged. He attributes this partly to changing family values and to the unintended consequences of overinvolved parenting, while insisting that adult children also make choices for which parents cannot take full responsibility. He fears that children who grow up seeing a grandparent removed from family life may later repeat the pattern with their own parents. At the same time, his account remains a plea from one side of an unresolved family conflict: he says he apologized and sought reconciliation, but received no response.

The afterword turns to a principle Sinay draws from Joshua Coleman: build an identity around strengths and achievements, rather than defining oneself only through suffering or perceived failure. He urges estranged parents to write down what they did well as parents and grandparents and to take pride in their accomplishments. He presents the book itself as a way of giving something back, and stresses the importance of support in learning self-compassion, forgiving oneself and others, and recognizing that one is not alone. He includes a painful email to his daughter-in-law describing the emotional loss of being shut out from the grandchildren, while saying he does not expect her to act on it. Writing, he explains, has helped him put words to what he cannot control, even though he still hopes for reconciliation.

His final note shifts toward living beyond the estrangement. He quotes a person online who advises grieving, then turning toward friendships, travel, meaningful activities, pets, and helping others. Sinay and his wife say they have followed that counsel, building friendships, taking trips, adopting a pet, and giving to people in need. Though the book is marked by grief and anger, its last emphasis is on making a life amid uncertainty: seeking connection where it is available, accepting one's limits, and continuing to find purpose beyond the family relationship that remains unresolved.