
RAISING BLUE-COLLAR KIDS IN A WHITE-COLLAR WORLD

RAISING BLUE-COLLAR KIDS IN A WHITE-COLLAR WORLD

Toughening Up Your Kids with
GRIT & GRACE

By

CONOR GALLAGHER

A Well-Ordered Family Short Read

Raising Blue-Collar Kids in a White-Collar World © 2025 Conor Gallagher

All rights reserved. With the exception of short excerpts used in critical review, no part of this work may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in any form whatsoever, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Creation, exploitation, and distribution of any unauthorized editions of this work, in any format in existence now or in the future—including but not limited to text, audio, and video—is prohibited without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible—Second Catholic Edition (Ignatius Edition), copyright © 2006 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover & interior design by David Ferris, www.davidferrisdesign.com

ISBN: 978-1-5051-3631-9

Published in the United States by
TAN Books
PO Box 269
Gastonia, NC 28053

Printed in the United States of America

*To Aiden and Patrick—my first two sons,
who have blue-collar souls in very different
but equally beautiful ways.*

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	1
Chapter 1: Ditching the White-Collar Mindset.....	5
Chapter 2: Chores: Your Secret Weapon for Success.....	25
Chapter 3: Toughening Up Your Kids (and Yourself).....	37
Chapter 4: Discipline: It's Not a Dirty Word.....	55
Chapter 5: Reaping the Rewards of Blue-Collar Parenting	71
<i>Conclusion</i>	81
<i>Recommended Reading</i>	85

INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

It used to be prestigious just to go to college. But now, a college degree is given the accolades that a high school degree used to command. That is, of course, unless you attend an elite college.

Statistically, if your kid attends a so-called “elite” college, he is likely to lose his faith, become Pro-Choice, graduate as a communist-leaning socialist, and adopt woke ideology. Highbrow education seems to have sucked common sense right out of multiple generations of Americans.

But this little book isn’t about elitist ideology. It is about the elitist soul, which is far worse than bad ideology. An elitist soul is one that feels entitled, that expects to consume rather than to produce, that expects experts to handle the hard work, and that feels “above” the dirty work.

Any employer, like myself, who has been trying to staff his company in the last ten years has seen a massive shift from previous years. We have a new generation of college graduates demanding grossly high salaries, accommodations for every possible scenario, and the assumption that they can work from home. Perhaps worse than anything is that the crop of new workers are, in my experience, completely incapable of dealing with criticism, push back, or authority in general. Yes, we have fully entered into the Age of Entitlement.

While a good salary and remote work can be a worthy goal and, of course, formal education is a beautiful thing, we have lost something vital as a society, and that is grit. *Grit*. So often in my own business I have seen young people clutching their expensive university diplomas, bewildered that they’re not six-figure salary managers. They are shocked that ****gasp**** they have to work in the office and interact with a team.

This age of entitlement has brainwashed many poor souls into thinking that they deserve the fruits of labor without ever putting in a full day's work in the vineyard. In reality, the young adults are not to blame. Frankly, I think their parents are to blame. They raised spoiled and entitled children, no matter the household income.

What I've come to realize, and what this little book explores, is that the most successful people in history, whether its presidents, business tycoons, or saints, all had one thing in common: grit.

While their outward appearance may have the luster of white-collar success, their souls remained blue-collar, which is to say, they never lost the drive to get their hands dirty, to work tirelessly toward something good—not for any lauds or rewards, but because they learned that hard work isn't just a means to an end, but that it can be the end in itself.

As parents, your goal is to get your kids to heaven. By helping them to form the virtue of grit, which is the ability to persevere, to possess grace under pressure, to have true longanimity, you not only provide them a platform from which to remain steady amid the storms of life but also give them the inner strength to push themselves to their fullest God-given potential.

Dear parents: teach your children to do things themselves, to get in the mud and get dirty, to learn as much as possible in those moments of suffering. If you do so, you can give your kids the chance to become who they were meant to be. But if they lack the virtue of grit, they will never endure long enough to find their true potential.

No parent wishes undo suffering on his child, no parent wishes his child to fail or fall into despair. But these things are realities of life. Suffering will happen. But how you prepare them to face these trials now will make all the difference. Handouts without consequence, handling everything for them, pacifying them with screens so you can clean their messes—this is not parenting. This is cutting their legs from under them.

Once your child is out in the world, having to discern his life, having to make decisions between right and wrong, what will they do? Do you trust your child to rise up and face those challenges? To remain morally straight and embrace what the world throws at them with grit and grace? Or will they run and hide and complain about the unfairness of the world?

Of course, you wish your children to have good jobs and great families and to be met with success in life. But no amount of coddling will prepare them. It takes hard work. In fact, a blue-collar spirit will help their white-collar career more than anything.

And this is the point of this little book. Your kid doesn't need to be a mechanic or farmer or plumber. They can strive to be the head of tech start-up or doctor or the president. None of that matters. The only thing that matters is the state of their soul. And a blue-collar soul is what will guide them through suffering and defeat, and get them to that luminous other side: grace.

So, dear parents, are you ready to help your children develop grit? Are you ready to help them reach their fullest potential? Are you ready to help them become saints? Then read on and we will explore how to raise your kids to develop a blue-collar soul in a white-collar world.

—Conor Gallagher

YOU HAVE
THE MORAL DUTY
TO TEACH YOUR CHILD
TO SUFFER WELL

C H A P T E R

1

DITCHING THE WHITE-COLLAR MINDSET

What is a blue-collar kid? Or better yet, what does it mean to raise a kid with a blue-collar soul? It has nothing to do with one's career or how much money one makes. It has nothing to do with status in society or one's intelligence. Someone with a blue-collar soul is in fact rather ordinary, and this, most especially in today's world, makes them extraordinary. It begins with clearing your soul of the world's dust, which falls like glitters of gold flaking off the golden calf of the white-collar world. It begins with emptying oneself of pride and sloth. In regard to our kids, it begins with helping them avoid pride and sloth. In short, it begins with humility and grit for you and me, your kids and my kids.

This, dear parents, is the blue-collar soul. And this book is my explanation of why you need to raise your kids to have a blue-collar soul in a white-collar world.

THE STORY OF A PRESIDENT

When I was a child, my dad told me a story about Ronald Reagan that I've never forgotten.

During his presidency, Reagan was often described as the most powerful man in the world. And yet, the president was shockingly humble and modest. Vice President George H.W. Bush recalled experiencing this when he went to visit him in the hospital after the 1981 attempted assassination of Reagan. The visit stuck with the vice president long after.

As he entered the hospital room, the vice president saw that Reagan wasn't lying in his bed. He looked around and almost left when the familiar voice said, "Hello, George." The vice president turned to find Reagan on his hands and knees in the bathroom. "Are you all right, Mr. President?" Bush asked. Reagan smiled and explained that he had spilled some water and was wiping it up. "I don't want the nurses to have to mop it up," he said. "I'm enough of a nuisance to them as it is. Be with you in a second." Bush later stated in an interview, "That's the sort of man Ronald Reagan was."

Now, this is a perfect example of humility and modesty, two virtues I've tried to practice every day. But more so, this is an example of a man who had a blue-collar soul and mindset. This is what we must teach our children to become.



"There are no easy answers, but there are simple answers. We must have the courage to do what we know is morally right."

—Ronald Reagan

In the simplest way, it begins with humility. In this anecdote from President Reagan's life, we see a man who had the whitest collar job possible—he wouldn't need to lift a finger to do anything if he didn't wish, and no one would blink an eye or judge him for it. And yet, there he was doing one of the most humble things ever—cleaning up a bathroom floor.

Now, this may seem inconsequential to you, it may seem like a nice thought but has no bearing on real life. But if you can't see the beauty in this story, then close the book now. Let me ask you this, dear parents: If your kid is president, will he clean up his own spill so the maid doesn't have to?

This is at the heart of the matter concerning our children and society today. We've lost something very important as we've gained and acquired so much trash. We've forgotten what it means to live humbly, to push ourselves out of comfort and into something far better. We've become afraid of real, hard work, and we've tried to spare our children such hard work as well. We've exchanged grit for comfort. But the harsh truth is that by giving your kid everything, you're taking everything away.

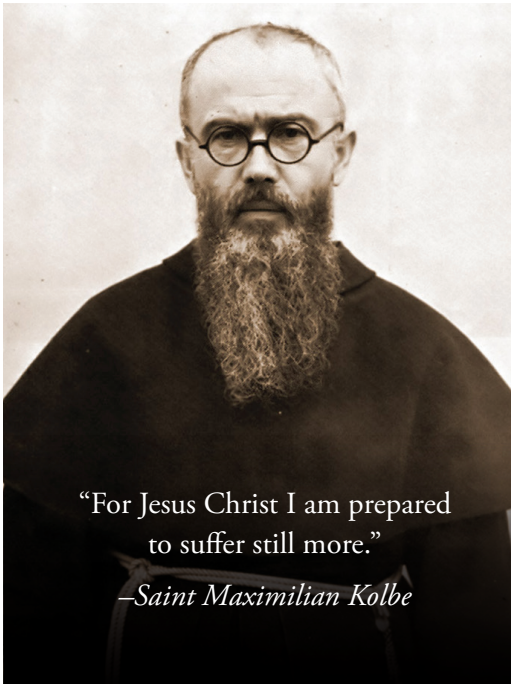
THE 40% RULE

Retired U.S. Navy SEAL Dave Goggins developed what is now known as the "40% rule." This he learned during his training and career as a SEAL. Goggins' rule states that when you think you've reached your limit or think you're done,

you're actually only 40% done, and you still have 60% left in the tank.

This rule is another example demonstrating the essence of a blue-collar soul: they understand hard work, they know that when they've reached a perceived limit, they still have more to go.

Your kids need to understand this. They need to understand that when they first encounter an obstacle it is usually, by nature, an easy limit to overcome. Things become hard progressively. Thus, a small amount of effort never



encounters a high degree of difficulty. Tough people know this. They know that suffering is endured for a good deal of time before they overcome it. But the wimp? The first sign of difficulty cripples them. They confuse it with a true limit, an immovable object, a barrier they are unable to scale, a suffering they are unable to endure. By developing the virtue of fortitude, or perseverance, one's threshold for suffering grows and grows and grows. It's not unlike the very first time you stretch and try to reach your toes. It hurts that first time, but you know the more you try, the farther you will reach. But if you quit at that first sign of pain, at the first pangs of suffering, you will never know the fruits of what lies beyond. Your job as parents is to help your kids push beyond those perceived limits.

Hear me, Christian Parent: *you* have a grave moral duty to teach your child to suffer well.

Perceived limits are at an all-time low in this society because of our age of comfort, leisure, and commercialism. Children are being pacified to such sad extremes. Especially when both parents have to work, it's often easier to give the kids what they want to make the suffering pass. We give them technology, we give them crappy food, we comply and compromise with tantrums. In one sense, the super busy parents are pacifying their children to make their own life easier. Do you realize how hard it is to make your kids do their chores? Sometimes it's easier for me to just do the darn chore than getting the kids to do it.

But remember, dear parent: Thou shalt not rob thy kids of the moral fruit of doing their chores.

STRONG PARENTS CREATE STRONG KIDS

In our complicated modern world, there's nothing wrong *per se* with two working parents. These days, it's extremely difficult to maintain a single income household. But when both parents are working what can easily happen is that your kids are forgotten and left to their own devices. They're pacified with T.V., video games, endless sports practices, etc., because mom and dad are busy. This can also happen with a mom or dad who's at home but are lazy. You can have lazy parents whether they're working or not. Parents can be home all day and still spoil their kids because they're not truly engaged with

them. In essence, it becomes this dynamic of: It's just easier for me to do the dishes myself. It's just easier for me to clean the playroom. It's easier for me to cut the grass than to teach my teenager how to do it. It's easier for me to do these things because training a child in the art and science of life is a very difficult, demanding, and frustrating activity.

More likely, however, is the dynamic where you fear making your kid work hard. You fear them revolting against you. I see this all the time. Parents can't communicate tough lessons because the teenager might say, "Whatever man! I'm out!" Is your relationship with your son and daughter not strong enough to withstand a little discomfort? The irony is that strong parents who deliver strong messages create strong bonds with their kids. Weak parents who can't deliver strong messages create weak bonds.

Here is the self-fulfilling prophecy:
your fear of ruining the relationship ruins the relationship.



I am teaching my kid how to drive right now and, honestly, I hate doing it. Driving myself is much easier. But if you're a parent who has a 15-year-old with a driver's permit, you have a moral duty to make them drive as much as possible before they get their license. No matter what. When I'm in a hurry and I want to get somewhere I have to take a deep breath and make him drive. When it's pouring rain and I'm nervous about him driving, I have to make him drive so that he learns. I have to make the painstaking effort, which I hate doing, and make him drive. Why? Because I have to use all of those opportunities to train him to be a good driver before he gets in the car by himself. There is a moral duty to maximize that time and train your kids. Parents that let their kids get a driver's permit and never get in the car with them, never teach them, are morally incompetent. Lives are at stake, and soon their kid is on the highway, driving through town, completely unprepared.

This same dynamic of actively teaching your kids must be applied with chores, with yard work, with learning how to fix things, with developing relationships. You must teach them. It takes selflessness to make your kids do stuff for themselves. When parents in today's world are so overwhelmingly busy with their own careers and social life and social media, they end up pacifying their children to make their own life easier. Suddenly, kids aren't taught even the basics of how to be an adult, of how to be a part of a family or community. At the slightest notion of work or chores, kids throw tantrums and parents compromise, making the moment easier, and the future much harder.

This is where the 40% rule can really help. It is a powerful tool parents have to help their kids tap into those reserves of perseverance and self-reliance. But you only get that by pushing your kids past the point of comfort. You only get that by teaching them humility and hard work.

TEACH YOUR KIDS TO SUFFER WELL

Jensen Huang, the CEO and founder of Nvidia, a leading tech corporation, recently spoke to students at Stanford University. While guest speakers are a regular feature at universities, Huang's comments to students made his speech quite memorable. "I wish you ample doses of pain and suffering," Huang told students. "Greatness is not intelligence. Greatness comes from character. And character isn't formed out of smart people, it's formed out of people who have

suffered. Unfortunately, resilience matters in success. I don't know how to teach it to you except for I hope suffering happens to you."

Huang's message was one of unflinching truth. Unconventional compared to usual boilerplate speeches of working hard or staying positive, Huang emphasized that getting a top-rated education or the best internships are not predictors of success. Instead, he knows and has seen firsthand that resilience, grit, and determination make all the difference. These are what he looks for in job applicants; people with these traits lead to innovation and success.

Now, I'm not saying we must make our children unduly suffer, or become Navy SEALs, or never watch T.V. again. What I'm talking about is instilling a blue-collar mindset, a blue-collar soul into your kids. A soul of humility, of grit, of a tireless work ethic.

Parents have the absolute moral duty of teaching their kids to suffer well. That's not an idea, it's a habit. It's a disposition that's developed over time. So, parents ask yourself: when faced with suffering, can your kids tap into the extra reserves or not?

THE CODDLING CRISIS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

To understand where we are, we need to look at where we've been. Post-World War II America saw a shift toward a more nurturing, child-centered approach to parenting. Dr. Benjamin Spock's 1946 book *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* encouraged parents to be more affectionate and responsive to their children's needs. While there are some, *some*, positive aspects to this emphasis, and while there were some, *some*, negative aspects to the pre-war authoritarian parenting, the net result is that we are in a mess today.

Fast forward to the 1980s and 1990s. Here we see the rise of the "helicopter parent." This term, coined by Dr. Haim Ginott, and popularized by Foster Cline and Jim Fay, described parents who hover over their children, ready to swoop in and solve any problem. The intentions were good—protect our kids, ensure their success—but the results? A generation of young adults who struggle with basic life skills and crumble at the first sign of adversity.

This reminds me of a funny incident years ago. We had friends over who had a two-year-old. We had a two-year-old son as well (we've had a two-year-old for over twenty years straight now). My son came up and asked Ashley,

“Can I have a yogurt?” “Sure,” she said, and then continued talking to our visitors. My son pulled a bar stool across the kitchen floor to the fridge, climbed up, opened the fridge, pulled out a yogurt cup, closed the door, climbed down, pulled off the top of the yogurt cup, threw the lid in the trash can, then

“Spoon feeding in the long run teaches us
nothing but the shape of the spoon.”

—E. M. Forster



pulled the bar stool across the floor again to the silverware drawer with one hand (holding the yogurt in the other), climbed up, opened the drawer, took out a spoon, put the spoon in the yogurt, closed the drawer, climbed down, pulled the stool back to the bar, climbed up the stool, sat at the bar, and ate his yogurt. Our friends thought my kid was a genius. They were flabbergasted. About halfway through the event they were gawking at the kid in amazement. They explained their kid couldn't do anything for himself.

I asked a weird question. "If you dropped dead in your house, leaving your two-year-old to fend for himself for a few days, would he starve to death or figure out how to get stuff out of the fridge, or how to open a banana, or how to get bread off the top shelf?"

"I guess he'd figure it out," my friend said.

"Exactly," I said. "The only difference between your kid and ours is that we force our kid to do stuff for himself. Given that he has a ton of other kids in the family and mom is often busy with a newborn, he often does stuff for himself just for expediency. But so long as you're pampering your kid, he's going to keep crapping his pants."

Admittedly, this might be a weird way of getting the point across, but I think it worked.

Folks, we also know moms who have groceries delivered to their college kids dorm rooms. I totally get that mom wants to take care of her little baby...but stop! This is delaying a very important part of human maturation. Humans for all of time have had to leave the cave and go hunt down food. Your spoiled little twenty-year-old baby doesn't even have to take a spear with him when he goes to the local Publix and sorts through the sushi selection and buys it with your ApplePay. For the love of all that is good, stop ordering his groceries. "But he doesn't have a car?" Well then, make him eat in the cafeteria. Or make him take the subway. Or an Uber. Or . . . now imagine them doing what you and I had to do in college . . . sucking up to an upper classman so he'd give you a ride to the store! That's right, even social skills of corroborating with others is being stifled by everyone living like an English Aristocrat with servants bringing food to them.

If you don't want your kid to starve to death one day, stop sending them food!

CHECK YOUR PRIVILEGE AT THE DOOR

Let's get real. If you're reading this, chances are you've got it pretty good. But that comfort you've worked so hard for? It's your child's kryptonite. A 2023 Harvard study found that nearly 1 in 3 young Americans latch onto their parent's employer, earning 17% more because of it. Sounds great, right? Wrong. This privilege is creating a generation of kids who can't handle adversity. Instead of forging their connection and blazing their own trails, these kids choose the path of least resistance. While it might give them a job in the short term, they become yet another helpless cog in the machine of comfort.

I was a child of great privilege. We lived in an upscale, white-collar neighborhood. There wasn't much opportunity to work with your hands or work with the land. And we really didn't do many chores. Most of that work was hired out. My parents, thank God, instilled so many wonderful principles in us, particularly the Faith, and they taught us hard work in other ways. But I'm not sure I ever fixed anything or built anything or cleaned anything until I was married.

When I got married, I began to see these activities as ends in themselves. If cutting the grass was just a means to the end of having a nice lawn, then once I had money there was zero reason to cut grass. But what if cutting grass was an end in itself? What if cutting wood and building a work bench or garden boxes was an end in itself? I wanted to learn a few things, and I did. And as time went on, I found that projects were extremely rewarding, particularly when done with the children. Mending a fence with your son is a marvelous event. And I've done just that.

Truth be known, I'm actually terrible at these things, but I've tried and gotten better. And my kids are better than me. I could easily afford a lawn service, but given that I have multiple teenagers, why would I deprive them of the great opportunity to build this little skill set, to encounter a sputtering small engine, to have to change oil and gas, or go with me to change the blades, and the pure joy of riding around and cutting grass. We'll talk more about rural life later on in this book. But suffice it to say, if you have privilege, check it at the door and go do stuff.

In short, parents, your overprotectiveness is crippling your children. A 2012 study published in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* found that

overprotected children are more prone to worry and anxiety.¹ When parents constantly hover over their kid's shoulder, it instills the false worry in the kid that he's doing something wrong or that he's not capable or smart enough to be self-reliant. You're not just coddling them; you're setting them up for a lifetime of mental health issues. A 2022 study in *Frontiers in Psychology* linked overprotective parenting to higher occurrences of anxiety and depression in adult life.² Is that what you want for your kids?

SWEAT EQUITY: THE CURRENCY OF CHARACTER

Here's a wake-up call: chores aren't just about a clean house; they're about building character. A 20-year study published in the *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* found that the best predictor of young adults' success in their mid-20s was whether they participated in household tasks at age 3 or 4.³ The study found that when kids engage in activities that benefit the household and that require them to problem-solve or push themselves either mentally or physically, they develop a strong foundation of self-confidence and positive work-ethic. Yet, how many of us are robbing our kids of this crucial life lesson?

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry emphasizes that chores help children feel competent and responsible. They learn time management, organization, and the satisfaction of contributing to their family. But in our rush to ensure academic success, we're neglecting these fundamental life skills.

In my house, chores are a big deal. Our chore chart (*on the next page*) is like a heartbeat. Here, you can see how it works. Every night after dinner, I'm walking over to the chore chart and yelling (rather loudly) who has what chores. I expect them to get on it.

1 Susanne Knappe et al, Characterizing the association between parenting and adolescent social phobia, *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, vol. 26, Issue 5, 2012, 608-616.

2 Vigdal, Julia Schønning, and Kolbjørn Kallesten Brønnick. "A Systematic Review of "Helicopter Parenting" and Its Relationship With Anxiety and Depression." *Frontiers in psychology* vol. 13. 25 May. 2022.

3 White, Elizabeth M et al. "Associations Between Household Chores and Childhood Self-Competency." *Journal of developmental and behavioral pediatrics: JDBP* vol. 40 (2019): 176-182.