

Keeping Up with the Jones' Children

The competitive sport of parenting is out and nurturing with total acceptance is in

Written by Tanya Erickson

What do you hope your child will be when they grow up? Many parents would answer a doctor, lawyer, or other prestigious careers. While these are all great goals, parents may be setting their children up for failure rather than success by setting the bar too high in order to be the best.



Creating a Successful Child

As parents, we all want our children to be successful and we often hear the phrase, "I want my child to have more than what I had." This is a wonderful wish to have, which ultimately comes from love, but what's truly behind this desire? According to Dr. Shefali Tsabary, the author of *The Awakened Family: A Revolution in Parenting*, it stems from "the fear that they might not fit in, perhaps even [turn] out to be quite ordinary and, in society's eyes, not [amount] to much."

Parenting is no longer a spectator sport, where we can sit back and let our children become who and what they are; it has turned into a competition of whose children are the best. Parents are so stressed about their children being the best at everything that they are going to extreme lengths to get them there and the children themselves are getting lost in the process. Dr. Tsabary also mentions a "paradigm shift" with parents, meaning instead of guiding children to become who they are with their own individual talents, parents are pushing their children to become something they may not be able to achieve.

What Children Really Need

"Children are pre-programmed to want to please their parents for the most part. It's devastating for teens to not live up to parental expectations," according to Katy counselor

Christopher P. Christianson, LPC. In other words, children strive for your acceptance and love, regardless of how smart they are or if they are the star player on their sports team.

Sometimes parents present their expectations in a negative manner. Instead of hearing an abundance of praise, children only hear their faults. When the child fails at something, they immediately believe their parents don't love them as much. This then leads to anxiety, depression, and a skewed self-image.

Living Up to Expectations

"In areas of high achievement, like Katy, there is the problem of children living up to parental expectations. In reality, most children would probably be able to achieve what their parents want. However, emotional issues like low self-esteem or self-criticism undermine the child's attempt to achieve," says Dr. Christianson. When your child fails a test or doesn't make the team, instead of telling them how disappointed you are, let them know that you love them regardless of that and discuss how they can do better next time. Many new parents are beginning to believe that they should be accentuating love and not academic and athletic excellence.

Helicopter Parenting

This type of behavior has been described as a parent who has too much control over their child's life. This parent

checks in with the teacher two or more times a week (when there are no issues), is too quick to run over when the child stumbles on the playground, gives in easily when the child is upset, and is over-involved in every part of a child's life. It's great to be available to your child, but when you begin micromanaging, you are causing more harm than good.

Overbearing behaviors can prevent children from maturing, learning problem-solving skills, gaining independence, and accruing life lessons. With helicopter parenting, "[children] experience us as constantly complaining about them, correcting them, and being angry with them. The consequence is that many of our children live in fear of disappointing us, if not in terror of us," states Dr. Tsabary. Children and teens are then less likely to come to you with problems and no parent wants that.

Making the Change

There are some ways you can step away from helicopter parenting. First, stop worrying about the little things and focus on loving your child. He or she is growing both mentally and physically and they need to have new experiences of their own - some of them very scary. Second, stop labeling your child and doing things for him or her because of it. If your child is shy, that doesn't mean you need to force her into uncomfortable situations to break her of this characteristic. Lastly, figure out where your behavior is coming from. It could be stemming from your own childhood which you are trying to make up for now.

Parenting in the Moment

Parents shouldn't place blame on themselves for signing their daughters up for cheerleading as soon as they can walk, or putting their 3-year-old sons in full football gear. According to social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest these are the accomplishments your children should be making, and if they aren't, you can feel like you are failing as their parent.

Remind yourself that it's okay, and your children probably won't remember, if you didn't create an art piece out of organic fruits and vegetables for every meal. It's also okay if your child isn't walking by their first birthday or skipping a grade in school. Recognize your child's own talents and keep in mind that they may be different than yours. Each child develops in their own time.

Just make sure your child's life is meaningful and fun. Let them stay up past their bedtime to finish that movie or sports game, and not to study. Let them eat dessert first and play in the mud. Teach them how to use their imagination, and to be respectful and kind. Those lessons will be more important in their later years than knowing the Pythagorean Theorem by age 8. Keep in mind that balance is key. **KM**

TANYA ERICKSON is a mother to a 3-year-old son. She believes in letting her son grow up to be whatever he wants, even if it's a Jedi Knight.



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