

ParentBrief



Helping our children get top grades: Are we pushing our kids and expecting too much?

Parents who are enthusiastic and interested in their children's education and achievement are wonderful. However, when our expectations for our kids are unrealistically high and our kids feel unable to achieve them, it can have a big, negative impact.

Sadly, some parents like the ones in the illustration, communicate to their children that they are not satisfied with their child's performance no matter how hard their child has tried and always want their child to finish on top...regardless of whether or not their child is capable of finishing #1.

In today's world, much is expected of the current generation of kids to grow to full potential, achieve and perform well. And as parents, it's natural to want our kids to achieve their potential. But where is it written that parents should demand that their kids always achieve at the highest levels possible? When we do so, we do so at a cost...are we pushing our kids too hard and expecting too much in the achievement stakes?

What is the right amount of pressure - am I communicating excessive expectations?

As parents today, many of us will have heard of 'tiger parenting'. Many tiger parents expect too much of their children and make it impossible for their children to measure up. Interestingly, a US study* found that although tiger parents do engage in positive parenting strategies, unlike supportive parents, tiger parents scored high on negative parenting dimensions. In debunking the myths of the benefits of tiger parenting, the study found that kids with supportive parents showed better developmental outcomes than those

with tiger parents; children of easy-going parents showed better developmental outcomes than those with tiger parents; and children with harsh parents showed the worst developmental outcomes.

*American Psychological Association: <http://www.apadivisions.org/division-7/publications/newsletters/developmental/2013/07/tiger-parenting.aspx>

Tiger parenting and excessive parenting may work for some kids. It may do little harm and some good, but for other kids, it can be a slippery slope – they get the support up the hill, but when they do not achieve as their parents desire, they go sliding down the hill experiencing low self-esteem and hopelessness. And when you are sliding down the hill after taking a hit in the 'ego,' it is more difficult to pick yourself up and try harder.

Almost all kids need encouragement and support combined with their parents communicating high and realistic expectations. When we communicate realistic expectations to our kids, it helps them internalise what is expected of them and motivates them to have a strong goal orientation for achievement. However, when we communicate unrealistic expectations, many young people because they will struggle to achieve lofty heights, many begin to feel inadequate and ultimately rebel.

Achievement: The good and the bad

While accomplishment contributes to high levels of wellbeing, it's worth knowing that there can be a downside to achievement. When children use their own or others' achievements as a yardstick to measure their self-worth, when their achievement in comparison with that of their peers is used as a basis for self-evaluation and a source of ego gratification, then achievement is loud, noisy, and can be harmful to the development of their human spirit.

When children develop the fear of not achieving good grades in school because adults have failed to help them focus on the pleasures of trying and have graded them on ability rather than effort, curiosity, and involvement in learning, their quest for achievement can cause harm.

Yes, keep your kids tuned into achievement

Generally, and there are exceptions of kids who are exceptionally self-motivated to achieve, we need to provide our kids with both pressure to do their best (not to be the best) and support and guidance for when they are not successful.

In guiding our kids in the achievement stakes, tiger parenting and excessive expectations are likely to burn them out. Whatever our reason for excessive expectations, we need to know that it often produces an effect opposite from what was intended.

Achievement is healthy and leads to happiness, to a sense of well-being and being alive. Yes, push when needed, but also know when to back off and allow achievement to happen.