

Helping Our Children Shine

by Kathy Slattengren

Did you ever gaze into your children's eyes when they were babies wondering what they would be like when they grew up? Did you notice some of your children's strong personality traits even when they were very young?

One of our challenges is to see and appreciate our children's unique combination of passions, capabilities, qualities and beliefs. This can be especially difficult when our expectations for our children do not match who they are.

Unmet Expectations

A teacher told the story of 10-year-old Ryan's dad who spoke to him about what a huge disappointment his son was turning out to be. While Ryan was getting top scores in this teacher's science class, the dad did not see Ryan demonstrating the type of persistence he expected.



For example, he bought Ryan a wonderful Lego Mindstorms building set and Ryan played with it for 15 minutes before walking away. How would Ryan ever succeed in life if he couldn't stick with something so interesting more than a few minutes? The dad explained that if he had been given that toy as a child, he would have spent many hours carefully creating all sorts of structures.

Ryan was clearly different in a number of ways from his dad. Although the teacher pointed out again how well his son was doing at school, the dad dismissed it saying he feared Ryan would never succeed in life given his lack of persistence.

Building Their Lives on Strengths

Our children will build their lives based on their strengths, not their weaknesses. It's our job to help them recognize and develop their strengths.

This is easier said than done especially when a child struggles in school. A 6th grade girl's mom was concerned about her daughter Emma's future given that she struggled with both English and math. How would Emma keep up when she transitioned to junior high school? How could she ever get into college?

While this mom's anxiety was understandable, Emma possesses other traits that will allow her to create a brilliant life for herself. Emma has a sparkling personality and wonderful interpersonal skills. She also had the confidence to sing a solo in the school talent show – and she has an amazing voice!

Emma's path through life may not involve the one her mom envisioned for her. However, Emma can find success and fulfillment by building her life around her strengths.

Helping Our Children Shine

When we allow our children to grow into their authentic selves, we encourage them to shine in their unique way. Sometimes it's hard and even scary to let them shine.

Since my daughter was a toddler, one of her strongest characteristics has been her perseverance and determination. In second grade she wrote about her goal of becoming a Level 8 gymnast. Despite breaking her left elbow four years ago and tearing the ligament in her right elbow last year, she persevered and exceeded her goal by becoming a Level 9 gymnast as a high school senior.

This is truly her accomplishment due to her own determination since both my husband and I gently encouraged her to consider quitting due to the injuries and the likelihood of further injuries. She stuck with her passion and has surpassed all expectations by qualifying to compete in Westerns, the highest competition for Level 9 gymnasts. When she stood on the podium to receive third place at the regional competition last Saturday, she was simply glowing!

Appreciating the Gift

It can be very difficult for us to truly see and appreciate our children for who they are. Our children are a gift. Getting wrapped up in feeling disappointed for what they are not causes us to miss the awesome child standing before us.

What unique gifts do your children bring to the world? By supporting our children in following their own dreams and passions, we help them develop their strengths and allow them to shine.

Kathy Slattengren is an internationally recognized, inspirational parent educator and founder of Priceless Parenting, <http://www.PricelessParenting.com>. Priceless Parenting offers online [parenting classes](#), [parenting presentations](#) and [parent coaching](#). Parents learn to effectively handle misbehavior while building loving relationships.

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