

Accepting Your Kids For Who They Are

By Kathy Slattengren, M. Ed., [Priceless Parenting](#)

When you were expecting your first child, do you remember what hopes and dreams you had for your child? Did you wonder what type of blessings this child would bring to your family and the world?

Perhaps you thought about how this child might follow in your footsteps and go even further than you did in football, baseball, soccer or gymnastics. Perhaps you dreamt about how this child might just be the one who would find the cure for cancer or become a powerful political leader.

What you probably didn't imagine is that this child would struggle to learn, not enjoy the activities you really like or reject beliefs you hold dear. You certainly didn't imagine your unborn child having difficulties making friends or succeeding in school.



Discovering Your Child's Gifts and Challenges

Once your child was born, you started learning more about him or her. This child was no longer a thing of your dreams but right here crying in your arms!

When did you first discover that your child might not fit all your expectations? That this child has a mind of his or her own which does not necessarily agree with yours?

This realization came to Gillian Lynne's parents when they learned she was struggling in school. Her teachers suggested that they take her to see a specialist to get evaluated for a learning disorder.

Sir Ken Robinson describes talking to Gillian Lynne, now an adult, about this experience in his TED Talk "[How Schools Kill Creativity](#)". Robinson recalled "*She went to see this specialist ... She sat on her hands for twenty minutes while this man talked to her mother about all the problems Gillian was having at school. ... In the end, the doctor went and sat next to Gillian and said, 'Gillian, I've listened to all these things that your mother's told me. I need now to speak to her privately. Wait here; we'll be back. We won't be very long.'* And they went and left her.

As they went out of the room, he turned on the radio sitting on his desk. When they got out of the room, he said to her mother, 'Just stand and watch her.' The minute they left the room, she said she was on her feet, moving to the music. They watched for a few minutes, and he turned to her mother and said, 'You know, Mrs. Lynne, Gillian isn't sick. She's a dancer. Take her to a dance school.'

I said 'What happened?' and she said, 'She did. I can't tell you how wonderful it was. We walked into this room, and it was full of people like me: people who couldn't sit still, people who had to move to think.' ... She was eventually auditioned for the Royal Ballet School; she became a soloist; she had a wonderful career at the Royal Ballet. She eventually graduated from the Royal Ballet School and found her own company, the Gillian Lynne Dance Company and met Andrew Lloyd Webber. She's been responsible for some of the most successful musical theater productions in history; she's given pleasure to millions, and she's a multimillionaire. Somebody else might have put her on medication and told her to calm down."

Like so many, it was Gillian's differences that ultimately led to her success.

Accepting Your Child's Differences

Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer is a classic children's story of parents who struggle to accept their child. Rudolph was born with a red, blinking nose instead of the normal black nose. His parents were embarrassed by his nose and decided to try to hide it with a black dirt nose.

When Rudolph complained about wearing the uncomfortable fake nose, his dad reassured him that he'd get used to it adding "You'll like it and wear it." The fake nose worked for a while but unfortunately it fell off right during the reindeer games and his friends were shocked to see his red nose.

Feeling rejected by his friends and family, Rudolph decided to run away from home which created even more problems. In the end, his nose is seen as a wonderful gift because it was the only thing that allowed Santa to drive his sleigh full of toys through the thick fog on Christmas Eve.

While your children were certainly not born with a blinking red nose, they may have been born with other differences which you find hard to accept. Macklemore & Ryan Lewis' song "[Same Love](#)" talks about kids who are gay. In the lyrics when Ben is in third grade and tells his mom he thinks he's gay she replies "Ben, you've loved girls since before Pre-K!"

Despite her reassurance, Ben is gay. The song goes on to say

*"And I can't change
Even if I tried
Even if I wanted to"*

What happens when your children can't change to fit your expectations? There can be tragic results if children believe they absolutely must fit certain expectations.

Jack grew up in a family that had high expectations for him. His parents and grandparents were all college educated and really expected Jack, as the oldest son, to earn a PhD. Ideally, his father wanted him to succeed in politics – perhaps a state senator or even better, the President of the United States!

It wasn't that his parents ever told him directly that he must achieve these goals but it was the underlying theme since he was a preschooler. When years later Jack struggled in graduate school, Jack decided he was better off dead than failing to complete his degree. Fortunately Jack did not succeed in killing himself and instead began the long path of embracing his own talents and dreams instead of the ones his parents had for him.

There may be many ways your children don't fit your original expectations of who they would be. While adjusting your expectations can be a long and difficult process, the best gift you can give your kids is to accept them for who they are.

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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