

# Are Parents Setting Kids Up for Failure by Pushing Too Hard for Success?

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Are parents harming kids by focusing on the wrong definition of success?

No matter your socioeconomic status, as parents you want your kids to have a better life than you do. But instead of launching a generation of happy young adults who feel driven to succeed, parents who are hyper-focused on doing everything "right" have created a country full of kids who are stressed-out, burned-out, and depressed. According to psychologist and author Madeline Levine, "Our current version of success is a failure."

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In her new book, "[Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success](#)," Levine says that parents are preoccupied with "a narrow and shortsighted vision of success," and that we rely on them to "provide status and meaning in our own lives." It's a harmful combination,

weighing kids down with serious issues -- "stress, exhaustion, depression, anxiety, poor coping skills, and unhealthy reliance on others for support and direction, and a weak sense of self," Levine says -- when we really should be trying to teach them to be resilient and independent.

When people are too caught up in finding the "right" way to parent, they can end up being physically present -- perhaps too much so -- but emotionally disengaged. "While you think you're giving your kids everything, they often think you are bored, pushy, and completely oblivious to their real needs," Levine writes.

A child's ability to succeed in life doesn't necessarily correlate to a parent's well-intentioned efforts anyway, says Bryan Caplan, a father of three and the author of "Selfish Reasons to Have More Kids: Why Being a Great Parent is Less Work and More Fun Than You Think."

"Today's typical parents strive to mentally stimulate their children and struggle to protect their brains from being turned to mush by television and video games" pushing them instead to strive for academic success, he told Yahoo! Shine. "Yet by adulthood, the fruit of parents' labor is practical invisible. Children who grew up in enriched homes are no smarter than they would have been if they'd grown up in average homes."

But as parents push kids to succeed -- and try too hard to shield them from failure -their kids are soaking up the stress and increasingly unable to do anything without their parents' input.

"In the name of love, we parents have gutted our kids' sense of self-reliance and independence," David Arthur Code, author of "Kids Pick Up On Everything," told Yahoo! Shine in an interview. "It's as if we run out in front of our children, removing every obstacle from their path, or else showering them with positive reinforcement if they stumble. Sure, they feel safe and protected and loved -- for now -- but they never learn how to confront failures in childhood when the stakes are low, so when they become adults, they fold like a house of cards at the first adversity."

The result: A generation of kids and young adults who are afraid of failure, who engage in dangerous behavior in order to cope with stress they don't understand, or who don't know how to navigate life without their parents' guidance.

"The cost of this relentless drive to perform at unrealistically high levels is a generation of kids who resemble nothing so much as trauma victims," Levine writes. "They become preoccupied with events that have passed - obsessing endlessly on a possible wrong answer or a missed opportunity. They are anxious and depressed and often self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. Sleep is difficult and they walk around in a fog of exhaustion. Other kids simply fold their cards and refuse to play."

The solution? Levine suggests that parents step back and reevaluate what's important to them, create a new definition of success, and then focus on fostering resilience in their kids.

"How would you ever know if you were capable or not if you didn't have to opportunity to try, fail, and pick yourself up again?" she asks.

Levine says that parents who want to raise kids who can really succeed in life should focus on teaching them these life skills:

- **Resourcefulness.** Teaching kids how to self-soothe, acknowledging that there may be several ways to solve a problem, and making them search for a solution slightly outside of their comfort zone can help kids learn how to make the most out of the situations in which they find themselves. That, in turn, helps them to be successful regardless of which path they take in life. But be patient -- children have limited resources, and it can take time to figure out what to do. It's tempting to try to rush them or, worse, save time by doing everything for them yourself.
- **Enthusiasm.** "Without enthusiasm, kids are just going through the motions," Levine points out. One major parental pitfall is expecting your kids to automatically admire the same things you do. Instead of pushing your kids toward your own goals, observe their interests and remember that their aspirations don't have to be the same as yours.
- **Creativity.** Academic excellence is all well and good, but some kids just aren't cut out for life on the Dean's list. The skills they learn from creative pursuits can help them learn how to think outside of the box, solve problems, and succeed in non-academic settings. Keep crafts within easy reach, Levine suggests, steer kids toward open-ended activities like reading and building with blocks, and offer plenty of positive feedback.
- **A strong work ethic.** "In addition to focusing on effort, persistence, and discipline, do make sure to notice other components of a good work ethic like integrity or the ability to communicate and collaborate," Levine writes. Make sure that the work your child is expected to do is reasonable -- expecting a kindergartener to perform like a second grader just sets him up for failure and you for disappointment -- and be sure to show them that you can embrace hard work as well.
- **Self-efficacy.** Along with having good self-esteem and self-control, self-efficacy -- the belief that we have a measure of control over what we do with our lives -- is crucial to success. "Don't project your own anxiety as your child moves forward," Levine writes. Doing so prevents kids from pushing past existing boundaries and trying new things, and robs them of their ability to solve problems on their own.

"We do not have to choose between a children's well-being and their success. Both are inside jobs. They are developed when kids are guided and encouraged to build a sense of self internally" Levine writes. "Ultimately, it is only our children themselves who pass judgment on their success, or lack thereof, in their lives."

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