

Teach Your Children Well

- Madeline Levine, PhD

There comes a point in parenting where we must decide whether to maintain the status quo or, armed with new information, choose a different course. There is little question that our children are living in a world that is not simply oblivious to their needs, but is actually damaging them. Given the amount of research documenting how our current narrow version of success is exhausting the resources of a small group of highly academically talented students and diminishing the potential of a far larger group of students, our failure to act, to demand change both from our institutions and from ourselves, is inexcusable.

We are at a tipping point. Either we will continue to show a lack of courage, or we will become proactive and decide that our children deserve a reasonable childhood, schools focused on the joy of learning, empathic parents, and protection from the excesses of a culture defined by materialism. I know that you're worried about your child. Worried that he or she might get left behind, not have the stuff it takes to compete, lose out on opportunities. But we do not have to choose between our children's well-being and their success. The very things that promote your child's well-being and happiness are the same things that will promote his or her success in the world. Enthusiastic kids who feel loved and valued for their particular skills and interests, who are both self-aware and aware of the needs of others, who can work hard, delay gratification when necessary, and reward themselves when appropriate, who find life both fun and meaningful are kids who are most likely to be both happy and successful. Deeply happy and authentically successful.

I know that it takes courage and discipline to fight an uphill battle, to compete with market forces that have unlimited resources, and to take unpopular stands. But here's the reality. Every measure of child and adolescent mental health has deteriorated since we've decided that children are best served by being relentlessly pushed, overloaded, and tested. Our current version of success is a failure.

Yes, we are all facing an uncertain future – technologies that we can barely imagine and jobs that have not been invented yet. Uncertainty is difficult to tolerate and our anxiety about how well our children will do in this only partially imagined world is understandable. However, the needs of children were, are, and will be irreducible. They need to be unconditionally loved, allowed to have an active and curious childhood, encouraged to challenge themselves, disciplined when necessary, and valued for the unique set of skills, interests, and capacities they bring to this world. If we can return to these essentials of healthy child development, then more than any tutor, prep class, or prestige college we can do, we will have prepared our children to lead satisfying, meaningful, and authentically successful lives.

For more information go to:

<http://madelinelevine.com/teach-your-children-well>

