

Teach Your Children Well by Madeline Levine

Author is cofounder of Challenge Success, a project birthed at the Stanford School of Education that addresses education reform, student well-being, and parent education.

This book's aim is to help us teach our kids to have more of an internal focus where success comes from within rather than from good grades, top tier colleges and awards. The importance of doing well in life will lead to real success where kids appreciate themselves, have zest for life, find work that is exciting, friends who are loving and belief that they have something meaningful to contribute to society.

I.

First the problem of our externally shaped high pressure society is identified. If parents are focused on good grades, elite colleges & awards in athletics or other activities, they may miss seeing their children's true desires & gifts. In turn, children learn to focus on the end result rather than looking within at their own goals.

Parents need to offer support as children grow independent & discover their own identity which may be different than parents own identity. Let kids discover their own identity & have their own successes as well as failures.

The bar we set for our kids should focus on effort & improvement rather than performance.

“this book is not about downplaying academic success, high grades, or prestigious colleges. On the contrary, it is a book about how to optimize conditions so that a far greater number of children can actually be successful without the accompanying high levels of distress that have become so prevalent”

Our job is to help our kids find & nurture their potential whatever it might be. Standardized testing looks at only a narrow range of traits.

“Schools have many functions in addition to teaching content and preparing students to take standardized tests. They are the incubators for the workforce, training grounds for informed participation in a democracy, and transmitters of perspective and culture. Hopefully they also function” “as places of nurturance in which a child can develop skills, interests, ethics, and a sense of identity. Until we are willing to enlarge the tent so that more children feel that school is a safe place open to the diverse talents of its students, school will continue to be the single greatest source of stress in lives.”

Fill school halls with all students work & not just outstanding awards.

Madeline discusses the capacities and challenges of children at different ages and gives a broader perspective of success.

Kids need time to learn to play on their own & explore outside of structured activities & competing. "Play teaches creativity, resourcefulness & social skills."

Parents may prefer the 'safety' of computer games to being outside without supervision.

Pushing our kids to miss sleep & family time to keep up the pace squelches

enthusiasm.

“What researchers have found is that this excessive focus on the self has led to a substantial increase in narcissism, and its evil twin, entitlement. When the emphasis is on how “competitive” everything is—grades, schools, jobs—then “looking out for number one” becomes the logical response.”

Rather than telling our children they are special, encourage their own accomplishments &/or efforts which will lead to genuine self esteem.

Kids need to be invested in their own choices, goals & accomplishments.

“Part of feeling successful at something is being good at it and most of being good at something has to do with effort and persistence. But here’s the difference: practice enforced by an anxious parent who sees mastery as a matter of life and death is very different from practice encouraged by a parent who understands challenge, who insists on effort and persistence but is not personally affected by her child’s performance. Children will be most successful when they decide which interests and talents to pour their hearts into. This is the work of growing up, to choose a life’s work”

“While economic viability is certainly important, and parents will naturally be concerned about their child’s financial future, we have our eye on the wrong ball.

If our children have the benefit of a loving relationship with us, a bar set high enough to give them something to reach for, and a sense of being understood and valued for themselves, then we’ve done the best we can to ensure that grades, schools, and eventually work will fall into place”

Don't confuse over involvement with stability & don't hold your children back because you don't want to let go. Allow your kids to grow independent from you & let them see you live your own interests, talent & work.

“We are spending way too much time worried about our children’s performance and grades—their heads—and not nearly enough time paying attention to their hearts.

If we don’t attend to all the needs of children we will find that our children continue to be denied the very things we wish most for them: meaningful and satisfying lives”

II.

Kids have different challenges at different ages.

Parental tools that are appropriate for the particular age and brain development are given along with tools for children to cope with life and find their own meaning of success.

Elementary school ages: making friends is fairly easy & relaxed & can be fleeting w/o distress.

Girls based mostly on emotion & boys on physical.

What may be simple to you is complex to kids so don't downplay or trivialize their challenges but rather support & listen.

“Early in elementary school, children come into a whole new mind, one that has the capacity to think logically, realistically, and strategically”

“Children who are interested only in performance, that is, being positively evaluated by others, have narrow goals. Their focus is on the grade more than the material. They are so afraid of failing that they challenge themselves far less,

take fewer risks, and therefore limit opportunities for growth. They are also at risk for perfectionism, a well-documented precursor of depression.

On the other hand, mastery-oriented kids are in it for the learning experience.

They are internally driven to succeed. They relish challenge, and getting recognition is a distant second to their own pleasure in their efforts and accomplishments. Interestingly, when work is not challenging, kids in these two categories achieve at pretty much the same level. However, when difficult material presents itself, the performance-oriented kids do poorly, while the mastery-oriented kids do well. The best way we can help our children welcome challenges is to encourage them to work just outside their comfort zone, stand by to lend a hand when needed, and model enthusiasm for challenging tasks.”

“When your child says, “Grace is really smart,” your response needs to be “In what way?” From the beginning it helps our children to know that there are many ways to be smart, many ways to be successful, and many ways to lead productive, meaningful lives”

“What we really need to attend to with elementary age children is keeping their interest alive and helping them figure out multiple approaches to thinking about content. It is the ability to creatively and enthusiastically persist in the face of difficult problems that is the hallmark of our most talented students.”

“Their internal world is of little interest to them. That is, until they realize that this inside world is of great interest to you. Here is where the construction of the self begins in earnest. You care about feelings and thoughts, accomplishments and infractions, and as a result your child will come to care about these things”

Don't compare your kids achievements with those of other children.

Middle school years:

“Power struggles are a big part of early adolescence as growing teens are driven to exert more control over the trajectory and details of their lives”

“Think of yourself as a sociologist. Keep your distance. Observe. Resolving the vast majority of high-drama crises that unfold over the middle school years is exactly the kind of challenge that your youngster needs to strengthen her confidence in herself. Conserve your energy for those few instances—bullying, sexual manipulation, harassment—that are really beyond the capacity of your child”

“With all the push on kids to grow up quickly, there is evidence that they benefit from an extended childhood rather than a precocious adolescence”

“remember. Parents would do well to be empathic, show interest, and not be overly concerned about these shifting states”

“Kids at this age are often vigilant about protecting their privacy, a first step toward emotional independence and increased self-reliance”

At this age children are concerned with identity & acceptance.

“More than anything, puberty itself drives a change in sleep patterns. Melatonin, which regulates our sleep-wake cycle, is secreted later and later in the evening in these youngsters. As a result, most teens don't feel tired until late at night, usually around midnight. They aren't being difficult or oppositional when they say they can't sleep at ten o'clock. They really can't. This change is called a delayed phase preference and since we can't change biology, we need to optimize their

sleeping environment and minimize their biological tendency toward being night owls”

There are as many accidents due to fatigue as alcohol related.

“and unwelcome irritability of too little sleep. Sleep restores us physically, emotionally, and cognitively. It should be at the top of our list of parenting priorities.”

“LIMIT, SHUT DOWN, OR ELIMINATE ELECTRONICS IN THE BEDROOM AT LEAST A HALF HOUR BEFORE BEDTIME”

Have consistent bed time, quiet time, dim lights, leave time in day for reflection & solitude.

“A sense of self always begins in one’s body. It is the first part of our “self” that we are aware of. While generally temporary, girls’ dissatisfaction with their bodies is a poor foundation on which to build a healthy sense of self”

Food is fuel, don't use it as reward or punishment.

“Do not dwell on weight—yours, your child’s, or people you see on the street

Teach by your own actions that what you notice in others are things like kindness, character, enthusiasm, and attitude, not looks”

“Normalize your child’s weight gain” it is very commonly part of puberty.

Gaining independence isn't always done gracefully as they are trying to find their way.

“While the challenges of early adolescence test your relationship with your child perhaps more than any other period of development, it is critical to maintain that relationship. The greatest protection you can give your middle schooler against unhealthy behaviors, behaviors that can reverberate far into the future, is your continued love, availability, and involvement.”

“As their thinking moves in the direction of adult thinking, their incessant questioning, criticism, and arguing actually represent a great cognitive leap forward (this is what psychologists like to call a “positive reframing”

“In the young adolescent, it is the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system that are most actively being pruned. And typically it is in the prefrontal cortex that “adult” thinking takes place. Here future plans are made, alternatives are weighed, risks are evaluated, and impulses are controlled. While there is a lot of pruning going on here, it will not be completed for another decade. The limbic system, closely tied to the prefrontal cortex, is a different matter. The limbic system is involved in the processing of emotions and their regulation, the processing of social information, and the seeking of risk and reward. Here changing levels of neurotransmitters, particularly dopamine and serotonin, make the young teen more emotional, more responsive to stress, and more likely to engage in risky behaviors.²⁸ It will come as no surprise, then, to learn that the limbic system is outpacing the prefrontal cortex. Since the brain is changing in ways that provoke your young teen to seek risk, novelty, and stimulation before the part of the brain that regulates impulse control and judgment is fully in place, we can see how vulnerable young teens are to doing stupid things. At this point the[...“At this point the brain is kind of like a Ferrari being driven by a twelve-year-old.”

“Teens are tuned, to the point of distraction, to the emotional tenor of others. So if you want your middle schooler to listen to the content of what you have to say,

bring your emotions down. No yelling”

“your relationship with your child changes, you might want to look at other parts of your life that are reliably satisfying”

“• Provide opportunities for teens to become more independent”

“Tolerate irritability and crabbiness, not disrespect”

Approach difficulties calmly & let you children be a part of a solution or adjustment in behavior.

High school years:

“Adolescence is the training ground for adulthood. In a relatively short period of time, your teenager will undergo a metamorphosis. Over the high school years, most teens move from lingering dependence to true independence, from selfcenteredness to concern for others and intimacy, from logical thinking to the far more complex abstract and hypothetical thinking, from impulsivity to thoughtfulness, and from a diffuse sense of the kind of person they are to a reasonably defined sense of self. These changes take place at different rates and to varying degrees in teens, but nonetheless, the direction is toward maturity.”

“possibilities:

High school kids are able to think about not only what is, but what might be. Their thinking is not bound by what is in front of them; it can also include abstract and theoretical possibilities. This is why younger kids, no matter how talented, can rarely learn advanced math or science. Their brains simply aren’t set up yet for complex and abstract thinking. But an interested and motivated high school student can tackle calculus or physics because he or she is capable of the kind of thought necessary to master complex subjects.”

“A calm enforcement of consequences (whether withdrawal of privileges or simply insisting that he not have any illegal drugs in his car) will assure Kids that while most things in his world are in flux, he can depend on a reasonable consistency at home”

“Our teens need practice and they need experience. They need to be reined in when their impulsivity gets the better of them and they need to be reminded often that the rewards of risky behavior are typically small and transient. Equally important, they need to be celebrated for their willingness to be more thoughtful, to take fuller responsibility, to work hard, and to increasingly become the active agents of their own lives.”

Having purpose in the community is helpful at this age.

“The widespread boredom reported by teens could easily be ameliorated if parents, schools, and communities provided opportunities for meaningful work for teens. Jobs, chores, mentoring, and volunteer work all contribute to teens’ sense that they have something unique and important to add to their community. Participation in these kinds of activities helps teens develop competence, independence, connection, and real self-esteem. It gives them a sense of being relevant, and helps them to construct an identity greater and more robust than the sum of their test scores and trophies.”

“We need to be available, to not bow out around issues of safety, to pay attention to our teens’ activities—where they go, what they do, and who they do it with. But aside from a few exceptions, less is more when it comes to promoting autonomy.

It's not a matter of withdrawal or disengagement. It is an active standing by, a loving holding back that allows your teen to flourish. This is not as easy as it sounds. Just as moving forward takes practice for your teen, so will holding back take practice for you."

Coping skills.

"I'd suggest that we serve our children best when we don't just tell them what not to do, but help them figure out what to do."

"Be less concerned about the object of your child's enthusiasm and more attentive to her capacity to be enthusiastic. Bolster her enthusiasm by showing your own"

"The world is endlessly fascinating. You can find what turns you on only if you experiment and sample." Kids start out meeting the world with wonder. It is our job to make sure that they don't lose their inborn curiosity, imagination, and creativity."

"Do keep the materials that encourage creative expression around the house and easily available. Think how easily available the TV or the computer is. Keep paper, colored pencils, markers, paints (all washable!), and puppets for younger kids; add an inexpensive camera or a musical instrument for older kids"

"Teach content. Engage students. Encourage curiosity. Value creativity and innovation. Children learn when they are engaged in the process of learning. By engaged I mean interested, invested, and internally motivated"

"People with a good work ethic generally feel good about themselves, are capable and thorough, don't need constant positive feedback, and have notably good relationships with peers and colleagues"

"Let your kid know that when you work hard, you feel a sense of accomplishment and pride"

"Too often we confuse compliance and self-control. While compliance is the precursor to self-control, it is not the same thing. Compliance is about following someone else's rules. Self-control is about developing, fortifying, and internalizing your own rules"

"Repeated positive experiences of self-efficacy help kids move from being dependent on others to trusting their own judgment"

"Don't protect your child from failure. Failure is both inevitable and desirable. It is how children learn what works and what doesn't. It helps them hone the skills that will be most effective in meeting challenges. Thomas Edison was fond of saying, "I have not failed, I have just found ten thousand ways that don't work." Home run legend Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times. That's nearly twice as often as he homered. "Every strike brings me closer to the next home run," he often said"

Lastly parents are asked to look at their own values & if they are living up to them.

"see your child clearly, love that child unconditionally, set limits when necessary, and hold fast to a core set of good values"

"we can expect to get some things right and other things wrong at regular intervals. Mistakes, as we've seen, are the foundation of competence. Our kids need to tolerate, even welcome mistakes, and so do we. It's hard to help your

child grow when you've stopped growing yourself. Don't just try to mold your child to be the adult you'd like her to be, work on being that adult yourself."

"Talking about values can become an almost endless diversion from actually living them. The point here is to get clear on what we value so that we can translate values into actions."

"We will find ourselves most capable of making real change, change that benefits ourselves and our children most directly, but also our families and our communities, if we inventory those things that get in our way and figure out how to turn down their volume so that we are free to act without distraction, distortion, or unnecessary anxiety"

"Show your child that values need to be acted on, not just espoused"

"You need to be able to make sense of your own life in order to help your children make sense of theirs."

"how you turn a C student into a B or an A student. Not with tutors, but by helping your child find what he is good at and interested in."

"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."

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