
Allowing Your Child to Reach for the Stars

Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D.
Gifted Development Center

What does “reaching for the stars” mean to you? Does it mean being successful in school and in life? Does it mean attaining fame—“stardom”? Does it mean being the best that you can be? Does it mean actualizing your potential? Does it mean developing your talents to their fullest? We hold different values and have diverse pictures of this concept.

Some define success for their children as completing school tasks eagerly, getting accepted into a “good” college, and making a six-figure salary in adult life. Some hope that their children will become the very best in their fields. And others just want their children to be happy, no matter what their life choices.

Studying the gifted for over 50 years, I have found that those who are happy as children and adults have parents who love and accept them for who they are. These are *responsive parents* who respond to the needs and desires of their children, rather than imposing their own agenda on their children. *Creator parents* believe that they can create a gifted child much like a yuppie pasta. Attempting to mold their child, they give him or her all the “right” early experiences and expect their child to live up to their expectations. They pour all their unfulfilled hopes and dreams into their child. Their attempts to live through their offspring leaves him or her feeling disempowered.

Annemarie Roeper (2004) teaches us that children come into this world with their own agendas. They are not empty slates. They are born with unique personalities and temperaments. I believe that each human being has a mission to fulfill and that life is about discovering that mission. As parents, we serve *not* as shapers, but as guides.

Some of the children I’ve worked with seemed to know at a very young age that they wanted to be ice skaters, artists, dancers, musicians, scientists, etc. They became enthralled with a discipline the first time they were exposed to it. These children exude a single-minded passion. Parents and teachers worry that such children are not “well-rounded.” But those who become noted in their fields in adult life are rarely well-rounded as children.

Children who are driven to actualize enormous potential have characteristics that are difficult to live with: perfectionism, intensity, overexcitabilities. These traits are essential for Olympic champions, for success in the fine arts, for scientific breakthroughs. If we are serious about allowing our children to reach for the stars, we have to respect and cherish the aspects of our children that make them different from others.

Those who have attained prominence in young adulthood all credit their parents for having supported their passions to the best of their abilities (Bloom & Sosniak, 1985). These parents managed to walk a fine line between responding and encouraging their children, taking their own egos out of the equation. They did not own their child’s talents or take credit for their development. They were willing to make many sacrifices of time and money, without being invested in the outcome. Not an easy road.

Parents are unsung heroes, devoting their lives to helping their children fulfill their potential. We are forever in their debt.

References

- Bloom, B.S. (Ed.) (1985). *Developing talent in young people*. New York: Ballantine.
Roeper, A. (2004). *My life experiences with children*. Denver: DeLeon.