

# Supportive Parenting: Helping Children Realize Their Potential

TODDLER

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Harness your children's potential by guiding, nurturing, and supporting them. By allowing your children to read and be physically active, it helps to encourage their imagination and creativity.

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*Children will become successful when they are in a nurturing environment.*

Parenting entails making sure children reach their full potential through guidance, nurturing, and good nutrition. Here are ways to support the development of your child's gifts and talents.

Parenting doesn't end with providing your children with food, shelter, and clothing; taking care of them while they're sick; and making sure they are safe and secure at all times. Helping children bring their talents to the fore and maximize their potential is another responsibility that parents find important.

Behind the story of every gifted child is a supportive parent, or set of parents. Daniel Coyle, author of the bestselling book, *The Talent Code: Greatness Isn't Born, It's Grown*, deviates from the traditional belief that infants are born with talent, or they're not. Instead, Coyle espouses the "practice makes perfect" route. In his book, Coyle says there are "talent hotbeds" throughout the world and these are areas that have produced children with exceptional talents. For instance, Brazil has produced some of the world's best soccer players.

## Harnessing potential

Some of Coyle's opinions may be controversial but his belief that "greatness isn't born, it's grown" is something many will agree with. Parents don't need "talent hotbeds" to raise champions and stars, however. Every champion and every star started out as a child with potential.

Tennis champion Rafael Nadal trained for an hour and a half, five times a week, in the most extreme conditions since he was seven. His uncle also trained him to play ambidextrously. Dame Margot Fonteyn started dancing when she was four years old until she became the world's greatest ballerina. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg became interested in computers when he was a child. Zuckerberg was taught Atari BASIC Programming by his father when he was about 12.

Annie (not her real name) is a mother in her 30s whose eight-year-old daughter Nicole is into ballet and math. Nicole also excels in school. Annie runs her own business but every Saturday, she wakes up early to bring her daughter to ballet school. She also needs to take time out from work when Nicole competes in math contests here and abroad.

"Nicole told me she wants to keep competing and winning. In real life, she is shy but when she dances or is in a competition, she loses that shyness. As a mother, my role is to support her and make sure she eats well and has everything she needs like transportation and a nanny when I am not there," says Annie, who is a single mother.

## Nurturing talent

Greatness entails sacrifice and hard work. Children will become successful when they are in a nurturing environment and they are loved and cared for. But before a parent can go and start taking the infant and/or toddlers to tennis, ballet, math and other classes to hone and cultivate his or her intelligences, it is important to observe and identify his or her gifts and talents.

Doctors, educators and experts say parents should always stop, look, and listen. They say the child should always take the lead with the parents as the guide/coach. Parents can bring out and nurture their child's talents by encouraging them without any pressure. Here are some tips and insights from experts and mothers:

1. **Read to your toddler.** This not only encourages the love for books and learning but it also piques the curiosity of the child so that he or she will look forward to reading with mom or dad.
2. **Failing is an option.** Sometimes, parents are so stoked about their children's talents that they forget kids are kids and they could fail. "I tell my kids it is okay to fail. They should keep on practicing to reach their dreams. You can't succeed without trying," says Alexis, an editor and entrepreneur and mother of three.
3. **You'll be frustrated a lot of times.** Your child is supposed to perform in the school program. At the last minute, he or she will say, "I don't want to, Mama. I'm scared." What do you do? "That's something I'm still learning to do," says Tonee, a freelance writer and mother of two toddlers. "I've felt unsuccessful a lot of times. Recently though, what proved to be helpful was when I prayed for Sab (her daughter) and prayed with her. After we prayed, she told me she finally

found the courage to dance and sing in class, when she previously just chose to sit it out.”

4. **Encourage your child's imagination and creativity.** Make sure you have age-appropriate toys at home that encourage creativity as play is an integral part of child development. These may include, but not be limited to, clay and blocks. If he is interested to get into painting, drawing, and illustration, for instance, you could tell him or her that the cartoons on TV are works of illustrators and explain what illustrators actually do and how they come up with animation. Then you can offer to enroll your child in summer art classes. If your toddler's interests are singing and dancing, turn a corner of your house into a stage where he or she can practice or rehearse. This would be helpful in talent development if your child is shy, because that “stage” is where he or she can conquer fear and shyness.
5. **Bring your child outdoors.** Being outdoors will encourage the child to be physically active and this may help hone the gift for sports. There is nothing like the outdoors to encourage the child to run, swim, bike and play games with his or her peers.
6. **Make sure your child is well nourished** with a balanced diet that includes milk. Milk is the best source of dietary calcium. Toddlers need two cups of milk daily to meet their nutritional requirements for calcium and fats.

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