



7 Ways To Help Your Child Achieve Their Potential

As parents we all want the very best for our children. We want to ensure they have a happy childhood and grow up to lead happy, well-adjusted lives doing the things they are naturally good at and things which give them pleasure. How can we give them the best chance of being able to fulfil their dreams and live the life they want? Fruitful, generous, productive, fulfilled – these are all the things our children to become. How to make this happen?

- 1) Shower them with love. Nothing makes any living thing grow as much as being tended with loving care. Plants – pets – children – adults – we all do much better when we feel secure and loved.
- 2) Encourage them to believe in themselves. Be conscious of the things you say to your children. Children will believe and become exactly what they've been told they are. A child who receives praise whenever they have done something good, will grow up wanting to do more good things. A child who is constantly criticised or told they have a string of bad habits will continue to exhibit this behaviour because they have been told that is the kind of person they are. I am reminded of the story of a wayward youth, whose mother used to repeatedly tell him "You'll be in prison by the time you're 20". He was there at the age of 18. Conversely a family I know with several children always told their daughter "You're such a good girl. You never complain". Sometime later the child was having a difficult time at school which the parents only found out about through another source. When they spoke to their daughter and asked her why she hadn't told them she replied "Because I'm the one who never complains".
- 3) Teach them how to think. No-one teaches us to think, yet it is one of the most valuable things a child can learn. I'm not referring to thinking about what to wear

today, although that is a good starting point with young children - "Do you really think you should wear your favourite summer dress today, because it's snowing and you'll feel very cold when you go outside". I am talking about deep, contemplative thinking. There is a goldmine between our ears, yet all too often it is completely ignored. If your child really wants something – a new game, an outing somewhere special, a new bike – rather than buying it for them as a birthday or Christmas present, tell them to think about all the different ways they could earn the money and buy it for themselves. Find a pad of paper and a pencil, send them into a quiet spot where they won't be disturbed (maybe their bedroom) and have them write down all the things they could do in order to get that thing. You'll be amazed at all the creative things that will pop into their heads. Chances are they'll appreciate it all the more if they've had to earn it, but more important than that is the realisation that they have a perfectly good brain and can put it to use to get them exactly what they want.

It is so easy as parents to give children directives – do this – go there – say this – don't say that - pick that up. If instead we take the approach "what do you think might happen if we leave those toys all over the floor", it is involving them in the decision-making process.

This doesn't have to be limited to a material thing. It might be they want to be the fastest runner/swimmer/sports person in their class, or be top in the next maths test, or be chosen to have the starring role in the school play. Whatever it is, let them really think about how they can achieve that, what it is they'd have to do in order to achieve that goal. Which leads me on to goal setting.

- 4) Encourage goal setting, even in very young children. Have you ever considered that babies are continually goal setting? Their baby babble is their way of trying to communicate with the adults around them. In time they learn to say a few words, then a few more words and then suddenly a sentence! Watch how a young baby will try to focus on a moving object in front of their face and how they repeatedly attempt to control their hands until eventually they are able to touch it. As we grow older we tend to stop setting goals for ourselves, but it's by setting and reaching our goals that we grow.
- 5) Encourage them to be persistent. This may seem an adult attribute, but in fact babies do this naturally from a very early age. By the time a child is approaching their first birthday many are attempting to walk. They watch people around them, walking and the child copies. When they take those first wobbly steps and then fall down, no child has ever given up and thought "Oh well, I guess I'm not meant to be a walker". No! They try again and again until eventually the days comes when they're up on both legs and walking! Why do we lose this instinct to persist at something we really want? Encourage them to keep going, especially in the face of discouragement.
- 6) Allow them to be themselves, not a clone of their relatives. So often when a number of family members are all involved in the same line of work, there is an expectation

that the children will automatically follow suit. A family I know are all doctors – mother, father and their three children. When the children were growing up, they were strongly encouraged to study hard and be accepted to study medicine at university, which they did. The children are now all married – to other doctors. I do wonder though – suppose one of them had wanted to be a plumber. How well would that have been accepted in the family? I am reminded of an analogy I was told of apples and bananas. If you're a banana, surrounded by a lot of apples, you may really want to be an apple – to fit in with the crowd. You might try curling yourself up into an apple shaped fruit, you might try to turn red or green, but you'll always be a fake apple. You could however be a first class banana – the best banana the world's ever seen! The point of the story? Allow them to be true to themselves.

- 7) Teach the art of gratitude. Being grateful not only makes you feel happy, but it also attracts more good things to you. In very young children this can be as simple as learning to say "thank-you" for whatever they are given, but as they grow, encourage them to look for all the good things around them and feel grateful. The best way you can do this is to be grateful yourself and verbalise this daily. You might be grateful that it's a beautiful day, or that it's raining and the garden is getting much needed water, or that you've just eaten a lovely meal or had a wonderful day out with friends and family. By growing up in a home where expressing gratitude is part of a normal day, you're setting your child up for a happy and fulfilled life because they have become accustomed to looking for the best in every situation. Something good is always there. Find it!



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