



Developing Your Child's Passion

My favorite quote is by John A. Taylor from *Notes on an Unhurried Journey*.

When we adults think of children there is a simple truth that we ignore: childhood is not preparation for life; childhood is life. A child isn't getting ready to live; a child is living. No child will miss the zest and joy of living unless these are denied by adults who have convinced themselves that childhood is a period of preparation. How much heartache we would save ourselves if we would recognize children as partners with adults in the process of living, rather than always viewing them as apprentices. How much we could teach each other; we have the experience and they have the freshness. How full both our lives could be.

As a pediatrician, my job is to ensure my sick young patients get well and my healthy young patients remain well so that they can continue to lead productive, fulfilling lives. My job is also to guide them in making healthy choices that allow them to be successful not only in the future but in the present moment. As parents, we often get caught up preparing our children for adulthood as if their lives begin when they reach the magical age of 18. We often forget that children are living life right now and have many contributions to offer.

Many parents lay the groundwork for success by having their children take extra academic classes or shuttling them to hectic dance, gymnastics or sports schedules because they want them to be the best they can be. Some parents, however, live their lives through their children without even realizing it. They frequently get caught up in preparing for the future and forget that childhood only comes around once. If you just turn on the television and watch shows like *Dance Moms* and *Toddlers and Tiaras*, you get a glimpse of intense parents who sacrifice the present for the future and potential stardom.

Parenting is very challenging because a parent has to separate dreams, desires, and interests from those of the child. Children can be very different and have interests that are opposite those of their mother and father. The job of parents is to recognize and cultivate the true spirit and passion of their child. Forcing a child to participate in activities for which he has absolutely no interest may actually cause more harm than good.

Now I'm not advocating giving in to your child's every whim. Parents often need to strongly encourage and sometimes demand that their children do things that they don't want to do. Certain things are not optional and everything is not always up for negotiation. What I am saying is that it's important for a child to fully experience being a child. Fun, normal play, relationships with peers, dealing with social challenges and trying new activities all help provide young people with the tools and experiences they need to develop into healthy, productive adults.

Children who "miss the zest and joy of living" are those whose lives are centered on preparing for something in their future that is not their passion. They may be training to be the prima ballerina when they would rather be in the school play. They may be playing year round soccer when they would rather dance. Young people caught up in this situation may suffer from loss of motivation, anxiety, depression, anger and/or resentment. Their parents may wonder why they aren't performing up to their full capability or why they seem to be going through the motions.

It's our goal as adults to find our children's passion and develop their God-given talents so that they thrive and contribute their zest and zeal throughout their lives. A child who loves to write may enjoy and benefit from writing for the school newspaper or submitting their work to online forums for children/teens. A child who loves to dance in the mirror should be encouraged to audition for the school dance team or musical and perhaps take an outside dance class. Parental support and encouragement is important in creating talented, motivated, and successful youth. ■

About Dr. Liz

Dr. Elizabeth Robinson Henry (Dr. Liz) has dedicated her life to providing youth with the knowledge and confidence to lead healthy and productive lives. She is the founder of Dr. Liz Consulting, a practice focused on making a difference in the lives of adolescents by addressing their physical, emotional, and mental needs. Teens, tweens and their parents can find resources on how to build self-confidence, manage anger and stress, and overcome issues such as bullying, emotions, fitting-in, and obesity at www.drlizforyouth.com.

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