**Childhood is Not a Competition!**

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Gail was complaining at a workshop that her 16 year old daughter Jackie was unmotivated. *“She’s so lazy that if they ever invent a TV remote control that works by blinking your eyes she’ll be the first in line to buy one!”* When I pressed her to come up with something Jackie was into, she couldn’t, that is until one of her friends shared that her kids loved whenever Jackie babysat them, and all the little kids on the street were always knocking on Jackie’s door to play.

Gail relented. *“Well, she does love working with kids, but I told her she’ll never make any money being a preschool teacher, and I’ve been directing her more towards law school.”*

Many parents today, like Gail, are having a tough time not over-involving themselves in their children’s lives. But there’s way more going on in our culture than just that.

There has been a tremendous push for perfectionism that rears it's ugly head in our obsession with grades, national test scores, select traveling sports teams, and the need to turn every endeavor into a competition; see cheerleading, cup stacking, etc. Parents sign 8 year olds up for Kuman math classes and to get extra coaching from retired professional athletes. Kids are constantly performing for and being judged by adults, with a relentless pressure to succeed, impress everyone, win, be the best, be popular, and to be special. They are constantly busy in adult-supervised activities, with little or no free, down time. And why? **So their kids get an edge, a leg up on the competition.**

Is this really what childhood should be about?

All of this pressure is telling us something about how we view childhood. And I am here to tell you that childhood is not a race or a contest; it's not about winning national championships in grade school,; it's not about winning prizes at graduation; it should not be about doing activities just to pad your resume so it looks good on college transcripts. Grade school should not be mostly about high school prep, and high school should not be primarily focused on college prep.

Growing up entails so many more important developmental tasks: getting to know yourself; understanding your strengths and weak areas; developing your social-emotional intelligences; learning how to build community, get along with diverse people, collaborate, create win-win agreements and solutions, and support your classmates; learn how to handle conflicts effectively; develop a powerful voice, to speak with authority and get your needs met, and to advocate for yourself.

If parents buy into the present cultural rat race, it's hard not to feel that you have to micromanage, motivate, and mold your children to stay on a course that you have unconsciously set for them. That’s where Gail is stuck. But that is just not how life works!

Kids need quiet, alone time for reflection, contemplation, soul-searching, self-exploration and discovery, and to decompress. They need time to play for plays sake, learn for their love of learning, explore and challenge themselves, and to enjoy adventures. Kids must be allowed to make mistakes and to learn lessons in their own way and in their own time. Every child has their own path and destiny, and requires space and support to build their own story and future.

Childhood should be so much more than a competition. Don't allow other parents and the culture to tell you otherwise.

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