

put your best foot forward

By Kelly Eden-Calcott*

Decisions, decisions! We have so many options on how to parent our children and how to fill those precious childhood days. But how do we decide what's best? One option is using strength-based parenting to focus on your child's strengths and accentuate the positives, rather than the negatives.

i'm so good at that!

When I became a mum to our lovely foster daughter, I quickly realised the decisions I made about her after-school activities were going to have a big impact on her. She was fantastic on sports days, but not doing so well in the classroom. Being a teacher, my first instinct was to sign her up for tutoring but, worried about her fragile self-esteem, I encouraged her to join the local swim club instead. Sometimes as parents, we have to look at the bigger picture. Of course, we all want our children to do well at school and be well-rounded, fit and healthy; but a child's lack of confidence can really hold them back from succeeding in their weaker areas. When we build up their strengths and their self esteem, the rest often improves with much less effort.

Focusing on positive aspects and strengths raises a child's optimism and motivates them to improve.

the tough stuff

Learning to persevere with the tough stuff

is a skill which, surprisingly, we often learn doing things we enjoy and can already do well. When a runner improves their race time, or a crossword lover tackles a harder puzzle, they push themselves because they enjoy it and believe they will succeed. Kids will persevere much longer with challenges when they're having fun and already believe they can do it. Once they see they can succeed in one area, they start to risk pushing a bit harder in others. The perseverance and problem-solving skills a child gains when they learn to do a new trick on their skate board, for example, then become the same skills they use when faced with a tough maths equation.

Children take on more responsibility for their own learning when they are supported by adults in positive ways and feel good about their abilities.

what a bright spark

It is sometimes easier to spot problems with our kids than find their strengths. We worry about their weak areas and that they will fall behind. But it is also exhausting and discouraging fixing and managing problems all the time. Parenting is much more enjoyable when we see our children as competent people that have something worthwhile to contribute to the world. One group of researchers in this area calls it 'finding your child's spark': the thing(s) that excites your child, their passion or purpose. Sparks might be obvious, such as music,

art, sport; or they might be more subtle, such as leadership, being with family, showing empathy, comedy.

Strength-building rather than flaw-fixing is energising for everyone involved.

my, how you've grown

It's easy to forget in the middle of homework, school gear sorting and activity juggling, but adulthood is the ultimate goal of parenting. Providing what our kids need to grow into independent, responsible, caring and competent adults sometimes needs a bit of thoughtful planning. What do they really need? All children need to build their skills - at school, in sport, and socially; to have opportunities to show leadership in some way, even quiet children; and to be involved in positive activities. Research from The Search Institute of Minneapolis found children did best when they were involved in a creative activity (art, dance, music or drama); a sport, club, school or community group; an activity at a religious institution like Sunday School; and only out with friends no more than twice a week. Your child's unique strengths will determine what these activities are.

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Discover your child's unique strengths and unlock their potential.