



Home Environment and Parenting as a Predictor of Achievement

By Kelly Nault

Although home environment and parenting definitely influence a child's ability to succeed, the number one predictor of achievement is a child's own internal belief system. Children's beliefs, how they interpret their home environment, and the parenting style they grew up with all help define who they are and who they will become.

When it comes down to it, it isn't so important what happens *to* a child. How a child *interprets* and *responds* to what happens to her or him is a more accurate predictor of their ability to succeed in life.

Home Environment: NOT a Predictor of Achievement

Children growing up under the same roof can turn out quite differently in terms of personality and achievements. If home environment and parenting style were the only predictors of achievement, then siblings living under the same roof (having grown up with the same parents in the same environment) would achieve equally well in life. Yet, more often than not, siblings achieve quite different levels of success.

Have you ever wondered why you and your siblings are the opposite of one another in terms of personality, skills and achievements? Perhaps, you may have even wondered if one of your siblings wasn't secretly adopted—even actually tried to convince them of this “fact”. The popular habit of calling someone the “black sheep of the family” comes from the simple fact that, in the majority of families, there is at least one member who is more difficult or somehow different from the rest. The reason children from the same family can be completely different from one another is because of what I call the “Law of Siblings”.

The closer children are in age, the more likely they will be different from one another (especially when they are of the same sex).

Although there are exceptions, the majority of families are affected by this law.

What Causes Siblings to Differ in Terms of Achievement?

One of our greatest needs as human beings is to belong—to find and have our recognized place within a community.

At an early age, many siblings come to the mistaken conclusion that only one person in the family can be the *best* at any particular skill. Therefore, if one sibling is the *best* at something, the other(s) will strive to be *the best at being the worst*. If one is the “academic”, the other(s) will be the “athlete” or the “artist”.

Parenting and Supporting Children's Achievements

In my parenting book *When You're About To Go Off The Deep End, Don't Take Your Kids With You*, I recommend parents use their home environment and parenting skills to boost the chances of their children achieving both the outer and inner rewards of life. Here are four critical ways to effectively support their achievements:

1. **Support Your Children's Passions** – Notice what each child likes to do. Be attached to helping them achieve what *they* love to do, rather than achieving in the areas that are only important to you. One of my 21-year-old counseling clients had, in her words, been “made” to have good grades in high school because her parents had a dream of her being accepted into medical school. By third-year university, this student was not only failing, but she was also on anti-depressants. When I told her I didn't believe that she really wanted to continue with medical school, she admitted for the first time in her life that she never wanted to be a doctor. She wanted to be a professional photographer—an occupation her parents believed was a waste of her natural intelligence.
2. **Encourage Your Children with Unconditional Love** – Spend more time using encouraging phrases that focus on the “who” each child is, instead of the “what” each child does. A comment like “I am so proud to have you as my daughter!” is far more encouraging than “I am proud that you got that A in math”. Linking your love and praise to what your children achieve can lead them to believe your love is conditional on their performance.
3. **Model a Happy, Healthy Adult for Your Children** – Parents can go far in helping their children succeed by modeling what it means to have a fulfilling life. Ensure that you experience both external and internal achievements. Internal achievements might include: going after your dreams, having supportive relationships, and enjoying the journey of your life (rather than focusing only on certain destinations).

Boost Your Children's Self-esteem with Opportunities to Contribute – Far too many parents are using what I call “hand-out” parenting in which they do and give everything to their children. When a child grows up believing they are the center of the universe, they develop a false sense of confidence that can lead to future disappointments. The best thing a parent can do is to help each child feel worthy by giving them many opportunities to help others (including

responsibilities and chores around the house!).

All parents want their children to achieve their full potential. Although many believe that home environment and parenting are predictors of achievement, true achievement ultimately comes from the positive beliefs children have about themselves and the positive interpretations they make about their life. So what are the two best predictors of achievement? How well a parent nurtures their child so they can discover their own passions, and how well they provide opportunities for their children to contribute their own unique gifts to the community.

Kelly Nault, MA corporate spokesperson and award winning parenting author of *When You're About To Go Off The Deep End, Don't Take Your Kids With You* inspires moms to put themselves first—for the sake of their children. She shares time-tested tools that motivate children to want to be well behaved, responsible and happy! Sign up for her free online parenting course at www.UltimateParenting.com.

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