

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator



How much should parents push their kids?

We need to find a balance where we can inspire our children from the inside out.

Article contributed by Dr. Yvonne Sum



Parents today believe that their children need to stand out from the crowd in this highly competitive world. There is nothing wrong in wanting the best to unleash the highest potential in the next generation. If we are not careful, we can create excessive pressure as 'helicopter parents' hovering over them in so many areas: academia, sports, performing arts ... and even imposing cultural traditions. Just like in *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mom* by Amy Chua.

We can also go to the other extreme and become free-range parents with our offspring dictating the boundaries of their existence. That would not work, either.

How much should we push our kids?

We need to find a balance where we can inspire our children to be motivated from the inside out. Each child is different. Read your child. Observe them and you will understand what makes them tick. Some children are more likely to thrive when they are challenged – so you can 'push' them more. Others will need more sensitivity.

Do I follow my or their wishes?

It depends. The difficult part about parenting is that different circumstances warrant different handling. Read the context. If a situation involves the child making a few mistakes to learn a skill (as they did when they learnt to walk!) then perhaps we can let them approach it their way. A Japanese proverb tells us to, 'Fall down seven get up eight'. On the other hand, a more complex decision will need more guidance and direction from the parents.

How much pressure is too much?

When it's a constant battle. When it's no longer fun. When no inner burning desire can be drawn from the child. Once more: read your child.

My daughter, Xian, had been dancing for six years. It was a shock when Xian told me she was quitting ballet. My natural instinct was to activate the 'Because I said so' reply – but I stopped myself in time to learn what had changed.

Xian confessed that she was exhausted. Besides ballet, Xian indulged in diverse extracurricular activities and was determined to continue her violin, piano, singing and gymnastics.

She assured me that she loved every minute of ballet and all the other opportunities she had been introduced to. However, she had recently found ballet classes had become a chore. She hadn't had a break in lessons since she was three and felt leaving for a period would do her good. Her ballet teacher assured me that a couple of years' break would not do Xian any harm. In fact, it may even help her motivation later.

When should we listen to our kids?

Always have an open mind. I am often surprised by the maturity in my children when I stop to listen. If they seem misdirected, by all means use respectful influencing skills to guide them. Always model collaborative engagement over a bulldozing approach!

What are the signs of pushing too much?

Simple, stressed-out children and/or stressed-out parents!

There are lots of questions to consider.

In summary, *do ...*

1. Set clear intentions and boundaries.
2. Come from a willingness to help – support *and* challenge them to be outstanding in their own right.
3. Use sensory acuity – be observant and present. Read the child and the context.
4. Communicate with care – know when to ask questions or give suggestions.
5. Inspire an inner motivation – light the fire in your kids so they are committed to what they do from within.

We don't have to continually push our kids. They will prod us lovingly to help us learn about their needs and desires. We just need to be willing to listen.

Dr. Yvonne Sum is a Sydney-based speaker, facilitator and parenting educator.
www.dryvonesum.com