

# Physician: Raising Happy Kids Shouldn't Be the Main Goal

In the years when I spent a good deal of time sitting beside the piano, coaching kids of all ages to count, to curve their fingers, and to phrase their music properly, I heard a common refrain over and over. That refrain was often uttered by the parent of the child, and went something like this:

*"Well, we've tried piano for nine months, and little Junior is interested in drums now (or soccer, or dance, or some other activity that modern American kids engage in). We just want him to enjoy what he does, so we're going to quit taking lessons and try something else."*

Never mind that some of those same kids would come back several years later and wistfully express their regret that they had stopped taking lessons; the fact of the matter was that parents had catered to the wishes of their children and made them happy in the moment.

According to author and family physician Dr. Leonard Sax, the phenomenon of seeking the happiness of children above all else has proliferated throughout American parenting in recent years. As Sax explains in a [recent article](#) for *First Things*, such a parenting method has severe consequences for children, parents, and society at large:

*"Unfortunately, when you let contemporary American kids do whatever makes them happy, the result is likely to be teenage girls who spend all their time on Instagram or Snapchat, and teenage boys whose favorite pastimes are video games and pornography. As a family physician, I have seen the long-term consequences first-hand. That fifteen-year-old boy seemed quite content spending his free time just as he pleased. But eighteen years later, at age 33, he has a growing sense that*

*life should be about more than video games and masturbation. He's living at home with his parents, working part-time at a dead-end job. And he lashes out in anger, often anger against his own parents, for reasons he struggles to put into words, but the words should be: Why didn't you raise me to be more than this?"*

So is there a way to raise happy, fulfilled children without achieving such poor outcomes? Sax suggests there is:

*"It is no use letting kids do whatever they desire unless you have first educated their desire. The first job of the parent is to educate the child's desire: to instill a longing for something higher and better than video games or pornography or social media, whether that something be found in science, in music, in the arts, in nature, or in religion."*

It's all well and good to let children pursue their interests. But the fact is, they are children still and at a stage in which the will is fickle and the mind untrained.

Perhaps it's time we realized that the path to raising fulfilled young people isn't by letting them have their way. Instead, the genuinely joyful kids are those whose parents took the time to gently, but firmly, lay down the law and train their children to pursue activities that don't always offer an immediate high or return on investment.

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