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Effective or happy childhood? - essay on how to prepare a child for satisfying personal and professional life in adulthood

Live effectively or be happy? Ensure children happy or effective childhood...

Putting stress on effectiveness means consistent work on cognitive development of our kids, gaining and developing newer and newer skills which, as assumed, are to provide an affluent lifestyle; we hope this will happen. Happiness is experiencing positive emotions, among others that of joy, but also living through worries in a constructive way. Happiness does not equal carefree life. Happy childhood means safety, stability but not necessarily idyllic childhood. Happy life consists in proportional development of all spheres important for a human, with simultaneous preservation of principles and rules which are sometimes limiting, but almost always give freedom of choice or allow the use of free will.

Is the choice itself crucial? Are the efforts to live your and your children's lives according to preferred principles sensible while many results of research show that inheritance, to great extent, is responsible for the way we are and how we function. So the eternal question is: upbringing or genotype?

However, the result of research also indicate that environment influences our functioning.

Moreover, according to Schaffer it is a closed circle: genetic factors influence environment, reinforcements may appear or not; and environment affects our behaviours determined by a genotype. (Schaffer, 2004, p. 68).

In adult life each person can decide what kind of life he or she chooses – effective or happy. Does he or she always have necessary resources to achieve his/her goal? What means for a little man the choice made much earlier by his/her minders or parents, and how it influences his/her future life?

Is it possible to make a clear choice? Effective life means rational thinking, in case of happy life the stress is put on emotional development. Are these two separable? After all, “the rational part of a brain does not act independently” (Damasio 1994 after Sue Gerhardt, 2004, p. 4). Should we choose at all? On the one hand, childhood is the only time and the only opportunity to form emotional structure. On the other hand, the lack of practice, training of systematic behaviours concerning learning or taking care of yourself may bring about unfavorable effect and become apparent in an adult life of a person.

A child appears in already structurized system, sometimes unfavourable, therefore it is important for parents to adjust the principles dominating at home to such needs and expectations of a child that will allow optimal development in all areas of functioning.

Because of their physical and psychological maturity, parents and minders perforce constitute for a child the stronger side, having substantial, often decisive influence on each aspect of a child's life and development. So, maybe a child should be given the basics of the both approaches? A child may not become a genius in a chosen field, but will be equipped with optimal resources in both: emotional and rational spheres of life. As far as achieving goals in adult life is concerned, normal development of emotional life will allow being effective in later period – in adulthood.



Maybe we will not release a genius, a perfectionist or a specialist to enter the world, but instead of this, a man equipped with well-developed “social brain” (Gerhardt, 2004, p. 29). The choice of purely effective childhood for our children may result in great knowledge, exceptionally developed skills, huge ambition and school achievements. However, with the lack of social skills, the above mentioned may turn out to be insufficient to establish favourable relationships, for instance professional. This may be the blockade for further development of these skills and reaping the rewards of earlier educational achievements. Since the contemporary world and huge civilization development is favourable to personality disorders, there may be drawn a conclusion, that putting stress on development of emotional life, thus ensuring happy childhood, seems to be a good solution, minimizing the risk of appearance of mental disorders in adulthood.

The same way we take care about ourselves to avoid illnesses the most common in a population, we should try to prevent our children against mental disorders. Now, in the population, we have 10 to 13% of persons with mental disorders that are not cured in mental health outpatient clinics (Cierpiatkowska, 2009, p. 312). The hypothesis was also formulated that “in 2020 depression will be the second and the most important cause of disability in the world” (Holden 2000 as cited in Seligman, Walker, Rosenhan, 2003, p. 277). If we ensure a child happy childhood meaning proper development of emotional life we will provide a child with a „stable ground” to react flexibly to future life challenges in adulthood. Sue Gerhardt in her book “Why love matters. How affection shapes a baby’s brain” devoted a lot of attention to the subject of “abnormal or imbalanced relationships between children and their mothers”(Gerhardt, 2010, p. 1). She paid the particular attention to how the early experiences in these relationships influence later psychological functioning – how this translates into achievements in a personal private and professional life. She states unambiguously that “stable, emotional basis” will help to become effective in adulthood. Therefore, it may be concluded that childhood should not begin with being effective – there will come the right time for that.

In my professional life, in corporate environment, I usually combined two spheres – I tried to act constructively – in accordance with the acquired knowledge in psychology, and simultaneously I took part in a rat race, forced on me by the workplace environment. That was not easy for me. Without the fundamental basis of healthy, emotional life provided by my parents, I could not have managed and I would not have been effective, while it is effectiveness that is so much needed in early adulthood period. Undoubtedly you need to have healthy emotional life to adapt to new conditions and be effective. Emotions affect our thinking processes and thinking abilities. In “Why love matters. How affection shapes a baby’s brain” it is said that children of self-contained, introvert parents who do not pick up or hug their children, later cope worse with cognitive tasks” (Gerhardt, 2010, p. 16) Surely, play in this respect has an important role, because it allows building relationships and ensures a child happiness.

Research indicates that emotions affect our immunological system, so it is advisable to take care of them in childhood stage so that in adult life we will not face the challenge of an illness – chronic, fatal or causing disability.



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Every day I meet people who in their childhood were directed by parents to achieve successes at school. In their adulthood, after finishing school and having careers, they try to find a partner for the rest of their life to enjoy all the acquired goods together. How it happens that finding a life partner turns out to overgrow their capabilities? Is it because of the age? "If we ignore anger, no matter what specialists we are, we can weaken our social position" (Gerhardt, 2010, p. 23), while this position also adds to achieving our goals.

Happy childhood and life according to Franken mean considerable self-awareness and knowing own emotional reactions; if we want to direct our undertakings properly, we should pay careful attention to our feelings (Franken, 2006, p. 22). „Negative feelings make achieving a goal more difficult, while positive help to achieve a goal” (Franken, 2006, p. 23). Does it really matter to have effective childhood if those responsible for our mature decisions and choices will be our parents. And what will be left when we no longer have parents?

Therefore let's give our children happy childhood since the lack of happiness is often a greater stress. And prolonged stress equals reorganization of attention and difficulty in learning. (Franken, 2006, p. 182).

Csikszentmihalyi claims that "working for money or recognition do not give the greatest happiness (external motivation)." In case of a child, happiness will not be brought about by effective childhood, i.e. imposed by parents, but by "doing things giving satisfaction (internal motivation)." (as cited in Franken, 2006, p. 401). So It may be assumed that happy childhood may form layers of internal motivation which can be used later in adulthood. Forming in childhood high psychological competences ensures, generally, good quality of life. It was proven by Trzebińska in her research "Influence of parents in the family of origin versus mental health" (2008, p. 201). The results of the research indicate that excessive control of parents over children, too powerful hold and domination of a parent over fulfilment of a child's expectations and suppressing his/her self-dependence coexist with mental disorders in adulthood.

The choice of happy childhood is also supported by the research whose results show that "in families, in which stress is put on independence and improvement" (not achieving particular results), "children have higher components of the need to achieve success in life" (Lewis, Haviland-Jones, 2005, p. 469).

Happiness is joy and positive emotions make achievement of goals easier.

Apart from that "joy increases being receptive to experiences, has regenerative qualities and may serve as antidote to stress" (Tomkins, 1962 as cited in, Haviland-Jones, 2005, p. 333).

Let me repeat once again – knowledge and skills are not enough to achieve life goals. One should also be able to cope with his or her emotions. Happy childhood provides such a skill.

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