If you tuned into the Winter Olympic Games this year, perhaps you join me in awe of the skills and talent of the competing athletes. With each Olympic event, it seems the tricks get trickier, the times get shorter, and the athletes seem younger. How is this possible?

Not surprisingly, parents are an important factor in the success of real-world prodigies. In this issue, Dr. Ken Kiewra identifies common threads among parents nurturing talents in domains such as chess, baton twirling, music, figure skating, volleyball, spelling, and writing. This must-read article touches on the themes of passion, purpose, practice, and, of course, parents.

Thanks to the suggestion of our active Parent Editorial Content and Advisory Board, PHP will regularly devote space to exploring the social-emotional perspective of parenting gifted children. Take a look at Dr. Janette Boazman’s article on hope as a framework for achieving goals as a fitting complement to other articles in this issue.

Lastly, one of my goals as PHP editor is to ensure there’s something of interest to every reader in every issue—no matter whether the gifted children you care about are 2 or 42! The inside pullout section is organized by age, and touches on evergreen topics for parents of young learners, school-age children, and those in college and beyond.

As parents, we know that our children don’t stop being gifted when they walk in the door from school, or after graduating from college. I hope you find something here that brings you a new solution, idea, or simply comfort in knowing there are others in your shoes. Parenting gifted children is a lifelong commitment. I’m honored to be on the journey with you.

Kathleen Nilles
Editor-in-Chief
Parenting for High Potential
Early in my tenure with NAGC, I was literally and figuratively embraced by a very passionate and active group of NAGC parent advocates. Although they came with diverse perspectives—classroom teachers, grandparents, state affiliate leaders, trained counselors—they shared a clear agenda for how our national organization, NAGC, could be more relevant in meeting the needs of parents and caregivers. They sold me, as well as the NAGC Board of Directors, on investing in a weekend retreat with a singular focus—to walk in the shoes of parents of gifted children at every stage, to identify their needs, and then create the resources that NAGC was well-positioned to deliver.

About 15 of us from all around the country participated. The two retreat leaders, Julie Gonzales from Colorado and Robin Schader from California, had a flair for creative props. To put us in an open frame of mind, we were each given a Chinese paper kite to build. As we held our finished kites in the air, we were encouraged to "reach for new heights while keeping our feet on the ground."
the ground.” By adopting this metaphor, we were energized to build on current resources and then reach for the stars. In fact, some great resources and plans came out of this retreat that have lasted to this day. The most concrete among these is the NAGC Mile Marker Series (resources for parents all packaged on a CD in the framework of a learning journey—complete with guideposts, on-ramps, and ideas for refueling), which took NAGC’s wide range of content for parents and made it available in a convenient, clear, and clever way.

Another message that was so clearly brought home to me is that parents are a part of everything we do here at NAGC. Rather than a subset of our membership to be considered “off to the side,” well-informed parents can be found in all of the groups that support high-ability learners. Since then, we have created space for the parent perspective—at the Board table, in conversations about our website, in our webinars, and in the development of our annual leadership initiatives for the organization.

That retreat was the beginning, and we have come a long way since then in our efforts to meet the needs of parents in this rapidly changing world of 24/7 access. If you have been a PHP reader for longer than a few issues, you can probably identify some of these changes yourself, including:

• More timely, frequent delivery of Parenting for High Potential—in a mix of four electronic and four printed issues
• A new staff position devoted specifically to parent outreach and resource development, including PHP
• An active social media presence on Facebook and Twitter that helps to build our community of invested parents
• A more user-friendly website packed with valuable information by and for parents—“how to’s” and practical advice—coming this summer
• A focus on building bridges—between parents and teachers, parents and administrators, and NAGC and other national organizations that represent the needs of children (science teachers, early childhood advocates, and school principals, to name a few)

• Outreach, outreach, outreach! So few parents know we exist. So many struggle with issues that we can solve together.

Although NAGC might seem distant from your child’s educational environments, we can connect you to a community of parents who share your concerns and to the best practices and practical information that so many other parents have successfully used to build a case for programs and services in their child’s own school. Our goal as an organization is to help you remain grounded—in best practice, in proven models for academic and affective support—while you help your child soar to new heights. Together we can make a powerful difference.

To access digital issues of Parenting for High Potential (January, April, July, October), visit http://www.nagc.org/phpdigital.aspx.
Seven Ways Parents Help Children Unleash Their Talents

By Kenneth A. Kiewra, Ph.D.

Amadeus Mozart, Pablo Picasso, Bobby Fischer, and Tiger Woods are household names in the music, art, chess, and golf worlds. All were child prodigies, mastering their domains with the best of adults. However, these classic artists represent just the tip of the child prodigy iceberg. What about prodigies in other domains such as chess, baton twirling, music, figure skating, volleyball, spelling, and writing? How do some youngsters get to be so good so fast?

On the surface, it might seem that talent is born. Talent researchers such as Howard Gardner, however, assert that talent is partly born, but mostly made. Mozart didn't magically play the piano at age 3 and compose at age 6 without hard work. His father was an expert musician and composer who taught Amadeus his craft; Mozart practiced relentlessly and logged more than 3,500 practice hours by age 6. Similarly, Fischer taught himself chess, developed an unbridled passion for it, and studied on his own and with some of the game’s premier players in New York City—a chess talent Mecca—where Fischer happened to reside.

So, how is talent made? Often, behind every talented individual are parents pushing the right buttons and doing all they can to cultivate talent. Following are seven ways that parents help children unleash their talents.

In his work, psychologist Benjamin Bloom concluded that almost all people can learn anything if provided with the right conditions, and that when a child commits to a talent area, parents must commit as well. Author Ken Kiewra studied real-world prodigies in various domains and shares his perspective on the conditions necessary for success and on parents’ roles in cultivating talent.

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So, how is talent made? Often, behind every talented individual are parents pushing the right buttons and doing all they can to cultivate talent. Following are seven ways that parents help children unleash their talents.
1. Discover Element

Psychologist Ken Robinson suggests that all of us have talent potential in certain areas of biological strength. Talent is most likely to blossom when we discover and toil in our true element.

My own son showed traits as a youngster that helped me discover his element. First, he had a strong memory. Second, he was consumed by certain topics like dinosaurs or car parts and would study them for months on end. Third, he was unbeatable in strategic games like Tic-Tac-Toe and Connect Four. Given these characteristics, I reasoned he might enjoy and succeed in chess. Chess was indeed his element. Today he is an International Chess Master and professional chess coach.

Howard Gardner suggests that parents should offer their children varying opportunities, observe them, determine their interests and strengths, and feed those interests and strengths. One twirling parent I studied agrees: "Parents need to look at what a child's desire is. Matching training to that desire can be a beautiful thing. But, if parents make a child do something that they want the child to do, then it can be ugly."

2. Provide Early Start

In my own study of talented youth, eventual national and world-class chess players, baton twirlers, figure skaters, and musicians were routinely introduced to their talent domain when they were 3–5 years old. Moreover, many of these children were born into the talent domain, as their families were already accomplished players, coaches, or enthusiasts. The same holds true for former athlete and golf fanatic Earl Woods, who gave Tiger his first club when Tiger was just 7 months old and had Tiger sit in his high chair in the garage to watch his father hit golf balls into a net. Before Tiger turned 2, he and his father were practicing and playing golf regularly on the course.

Time, practice, and biological development are distinct advantages to an early start. Youngsters can commit more time to their talent area when they are not busy with school and homework. The sooner one begins, the more practice hours one can log. And, Daniel Coyle documents how practice in childhood produces greater brain growth than practice in adulthood. All these advantages accumulate and multiply quickly.

Talent author Malcolm Gladwell reports that the rosters of elite junior and professional hockey teams in Canada are littered with players whose birthdays primarily fall in the first three months of the calendar year. This is not an astrological phenomenon, but one that fits with the January 1st cut-off age for junior hockey. In short, players born earlier in a particular calendar year have a physical advantage over players born later in that same calendar year. That early physical advantage leads to more playing time which leads to greater skill development. That skill development advantage, in turn, leads to other advantages down the road such as working with better teams and coaches. Early advantages accumulate.

3. Establish Center of Excellence

Talent author Matthew Syed discovered that one small British road and immediate neighborhood produced more outstanding table tennis players in the 1980s than all the other roads throughout England combined. How was this possible? It wasn't the drinking water, but rather the influence of a charismatic schoolteacher. This teacher was an elite and avid table tennis player and opened an after-school program in a dilapidated facility for neighborhood kids. All the kids had keys and near round-the-clock access. In a short time, this facility became a Ping-Pong center of excellence.

Such centers of excellence are fairly widespread. New York City, as mentioned, is a center of excellence for chess and was the starting point for Bobby Fischer, Josh
parents’ roles in cultivating talent

Waitzkin, and other chess prodigies. Similarly, the Rocky Mountain region is a natural haven for winter sport athletes. When kids grow up in such areas, they have access to elite coaches and other competitors who can push them and help them grow. Parents should look in their own backyards for such talent development opportunities.

Enterprising parents can establish their own centers of excellence. In my work, I discovered parents bring elite coaches to visit or live in their home for a time. Twirler parents hold community exhibitions and competitions that build interest and attract new competitors to the domain. Chess parents create a chess culture in their hometowns by organizing camps and tournaments.

In addition, centers of excellence might soon become as widespread as the Internet allows. Previously, chess talent emerged only from major cities where competitive tournaments and top-flight instructors were available. Now players everywhere have easy access to the world’s top instructors via Skype and a computer chess interface. Players can also play live competitive games anytime with the click of a mouse, or search game archives to analyze moves. Computer-assisted training is possible in other domains, too, and makes excellence available to all.

4. Facilitate Practice

An enriched early environment might jump-start a child on the road to Carnegie Hall, but it takes practice, practice, and more practice to deliver him. Retrospective studies such as Gardner’s confirm that talented musicians like Mozart and artists like Picasso, despite their early talents, practiced arduously for 10 or more years before completing a significant work. This 10-year rule has more recently been extended to a variety of other domains such as chess, math, science, swimming, tennis, and literature.

Practice, though, is different from playing or performing. Talent author Geoff Colvin illustrates that practice must be deliberate. This means that learners must work repeatedly on specific skills outside their comfort zones.

Josh Waitzkin credits his world-class rise in two domains to deliberate practice. As a chess competitor, Josh didn’t practice by just playing a lot of games. Instead, he painstakingly studied the variations that arose from a single chess position for days. Later, as a martial artist, Josh deliberately practiced against stronger competitors asking them to target his weaknesses so that he could strengthen them. And, when he broke his dominant hand, he practiced fighting with the other hand to make that one equally dominant.

Parents often go to great lengths to ensure their talented children can practice. In my studies, one parent of an ice skater attended all her daughter’s practices for the past 14 years: 4 hours a day on the ice, 2 hours a day off the ice, 6 days every week. The parent of a twirler rented an indoor tennis court so her daughter could practice when gym space was unavailable; another built a great room with an extra high ceiling in her home so that her daughter could practice indoors during inclement weather.

5. Arrange for Instruction

Getting budding talent to bloom also depends on securing teachers who can build early interest, hone technical skills, and develop a personal style. Bloom found that talented children often progress through a series of mentors. First mentors introduce the child to the talent area, teach the basics, and establish a love for the domain. When the child is ready to move on, a second mentor is secured—a technical expert, a perfectionist who emphasizes precision and accuracy. Finally, the best of the best often secure a third mentor, a master expert recognized as an elite teacher in the field. These masters help students to analyze and correct minor flaws and to develop a personal style.

All of the young stars I studied worked with a series of coaches as described by Bloom. Often, a parent serves as the child’s first coach and introduces the child to the talent domain in a playful way. In some cases, parents continue on as technical coaches, particularly those who are accomplished in their own right. Nearly all of the twirler moms I studied were professional twirling coaches, most chess dads were competent players, and the volleyball parents were often former players. One chess parent was merely a recreational player when his son caught the chess bug. This father studied chess on his own about 20 hours a week in order to teach his son.

(Continued on p.18)
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March Madness!
A Look at Evergreen Parenting Topics

Many topics in the world of gifted are evergreen. Whether it be 1964 or 2014, they're still relevant. In this issue, Parenting for High Potential takes a peek into the archives to look at topics that have run in various March issues of PHP through the years. No matter where you are on the gifted journey, there's something here for everyone!

Early Childhood

Creativity
Has your child ever transformed yardsticks into skis or put socks on his ears, crawled on the floor, and then barked as an imaginary dog? Creative behavior in children provides new perspectives on the ordinary. We can spot creativity in children by the way they look at a concrete object in a new way or how they construct things with blocks or LEGO® bricks. Creative children:

- display a keen sense of humor,
- focus deeply on playing,
- enjoy using objects to represent other things,
- enjoy playing alone,
- invent new games,
- display extreme curiosity,
- resist completing a chosen task, or
- exhibit unusual sensitivity.

Although not always joyful and sometimes exhausting, parents, caregivers, and teachers should try to be patient when curiosity leads to constant questioning. Children resisting closure on tasks may be viewed as stubborn or nonconforming, but really just need more time to think creatively.

It's important to provide a home environment that allows creative ideas to flow while teaching survival strategies for other settings perhaps not as friendly to creative ideas. Children should have the autonomy to pursue projects that interest them with-
out interference; parents should encourage them to gather their own materials and refrain from assisting, unless asked.

Finally, parents should ask questions that lead to a variety of responses, not just one single right answer. Open-ended questions facilitate creative responses and are just as useful when figuring out ways to arrange their toys or developing new twists in a story you are reading together. Freedom followed by encouragement fosters creativity and builds self-esteem.


**Other Resources**

**Enrichment in the Early Years**

**Importance of Play**

**School Years**

**Why Gifted Children May Not Test Well**
If children are gifted, it’s likely assumed they will do well on tests. Sometimes, however, what makes children who they are is also what makes it more difficult for them to succeed on tests. Underlying patterns for poor test performance may include lack of motivation, overthinking, perfectionism, overconfidence and sloppiness, excessive test stress, and administration of the wrong test.

Some strategies for overcoming these barriers include:

- **Motivation.** If a child truly doesn’t care, begging, pleading, and throwing resources at her won’t help. Find out what motivates the child and what she cares about—in school it might be a particular subject or the desire to go to college and experience a different environment. Rewards and punishments need to be carefully administered, and be reasonable, proportionate, and applied consistently. If the child is achieving only to get an external reward, the moment of failure will be merely postponed.

- **Overthinking.** Gifted students come up with possibilities that others don’t see. Particularly on multiple-choice tests, coming up with only one answer can be difficult. Overthinkers should note when they are following the straightforward path or going fishing. By assessing personal test-taking patterns, overthinkers can develop a sense of when they are going too far.

- **Perfectionism.** On timed tests, perfectionists may become obsessed with certain questions and devote too much time to answering them.
Often they do well on the questions they answer, but don’t answer enough questions to score well. Students first need to recognize that searching for perfectionism on certain tests may be doing them harm. Then, practicing in non-test situations—such as solving math problems or writing an essay within a specific timeframe—helps take the sting out of every mistake. Sports or card games, like Bridge, help the perfectionist find a better balance.

• **Sloppiness.** This may be difficult to analyze, as a sloppy test score looks the same as one from a student with lower ability. Sometimes this is the most obvious and overlooked issue. If a student can handle tough abstract algebra concepts but blows a question with a careless mistake, then sloppiness may be the cause. Slowing down and double-checking helps; students need to recognize the types of mistakes they are likely to make. Look for patterns by examining recent test scores. How many errors were caused by calculation mistakes or not answering the question asked?

• **Stress.** Test stress has both physical and mental ramifications. Physically, the stressed out student may experience an increased heart rate, excessive perspiration, and shaking. Mentally, he may experience panic, a sense of doom, and a cycle of negativity. First, the student must recognize its cause: Test stress may be an overreaction to lack of preparedness or fear of a low score. Preparation and practice and becoming familiar with the test can help.

If your child has gifts that aren’t measured by an exam, consider seeking a context where his or her gifts can be expressed. The most important thing to understand is that not testing well is solvable and not a life sentence. Adapted from Paris, B. (2009, March). Parenting for High Potential, 19–24.

**Other Resources**

*Boredom, Organization, and Underachievement*


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points, then the interesting ones. Then, evaluate. This is a simple tool to use with children and young adults.

• **FIP (First Important Priorities).** This tool helps minimize procrastination by prioritizing the list of factors that must be considered in order to complete a project or make a decision. Create a list of the factors and/or actions and select the top three priorities. There are no right or wrong answers because each person is looking at the list from a different perspective. If your child has trouble picking out the top three, start by dropping the least important factor in the decision and try again.

• **OPV (Other People's Viewpoints).** Help your child walk in someone else’s shoes to accept a situation or change her behavior/expectations. If your child has difficulty making friends, understanding why teachers give homework, or seeing a parent’s point of view on chores, consider this tool.

• **Brainstorming With Post-Its®.** Participants use Post-It® notes to write down ideas related to a problem for 3–5 minutes and post them on a wall or flip chart. The pluses include speed and anonymity; the minus is there’s no piggybacking of ideas. This process is effective for solving family problems or school-related conflicts.

• **Brainwriting.** Each family member takes a piece of paper and writes down an idea. The papers are put in the center of the table and exchanged; family members then read the idea on the paper they took and build upon it. This can be used with children who are less verbal to help them participate equally in idea generating and decision-making.

These tools will help build your child’s self-esteem, make choices, solve problems, and think.


**Other Resources**

**Relocation and New School**

**Freshman Blues**

**Resources**

*NAGC Mile Marker Series (2nd ed.)*. This CD contains these articles and more than 350 other resources for parents of gifted children at various stages of the gifted journey. $24.95. https://www.nagc.org/NAGC2/NGCSshopper/ProductDetails.aspx?productID=NGC42112
Every day, we hear parents, teachers, and students use the word hope, but what exactly does it mean? When we read or hear the word, we might think of a positive thought, outlook, or desire. However, it’s a nebulous word. It implies that something will automatically or magically occur without effort. And, although having an optimistic outlook is important to overall well-being, an individual with an unstructured, immeasurable concept of hope creates a vague expectation—almost as if the individual is a passive bystander waiting for an outcome to happen.

What happens when hope is viewed as an active construct? Studies have found that, when used in a proactive manner, hope can become a useful framework to help achieve goals (Snyder, 1995) and contribute to personal and psychological well-being.

**Positive Psychology: A Strengths Approach**

Historically, psychologists have approached the study of psychological well-being from a deficit perspective, focusing on treating and alleviating pathologies (Seligman, 2003). Over time, psychologists have taken an increasingly proactive and positive approach to the study and development of individuals and their happiness. Positive psychologists focus on developing the individual’s strengths, fostering the growth of positive responses to adversity, and strengthening social and emotional foundations in the individual’s life (Diener, 2000). They study well-being, contentment, and satisfaction with the
past, flow and happiness in the present, and optimism for the future (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Hope is one of many positive psychological constructs that contribute to a person’s well-being. Menninger (1959) was one of the first to study hope as a psychological construct by defining hope as the positive expectation for attaining goals. He presented the idea that hope, while a basic part of daily human operation, was ill-defined and obscure. Menninger theorized that some mental illness reflected a lack of hope; he believed successful treatment included reestablishing hope for those who were suffering.

Contemporary researchers have continued to build upon a strengths approach to examining the role of hope in psychological well-being (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991; Snyder, Rand, Sigmon, Snyder, & Lopez, 2002). Hope is the link between goals dreamed today and the attainment of those goals in the future (Snyder et al., 1991). Hopeful individuals view themselves as being able to create paths (pathways thinking) to achieve their goals; they initiate steps (agency thinking) toward achieving goals and sustain their course along a route to success.

What Hope Research Tells Us

C. R. Snyder and his team of contemporary researchers have written about hopefulness. Snyder developed the Adult Dispositional Hope Scale and the Children’s Hope Scale to offer researchers an active, measurable framework for the study of hope. Using Snyder’s hope scales, research has found that high-hope individuals:

• Are able to set goals, make flexible plans to achieve the goals they set, and then take action toward goal attainment. When comparing high-hope and low-hope individuals, high-hopers think more positively about themselves, set higher goals, and select more goals.

• Have a stronger belief in the likelihood that they will achieve their goals. They focus on success.

• Possess self-referential beliefs in situations of adversity. Those who are hopeful have an undercurrent of internal self-statements such, “I can,” “I’ll make it,” and “I won’t give up.”

• Trust in themselves to be able to adjust to prospective trouble and losses (Snyder, LaPointe, Crowson, & Early, 1998).

On the other hand, individuals lacking hope:

• Believe pathways to their goals are unavailable to them; they set low goals and have a sense of uncertainty and failure about being able to achieve their goals.

• Have a tendency to experience negative emotions when working toward their goals (Snyder, 1994).

Hope and the Gifted

Research on the contribution of hope to the overall well-being of gifted learners and the long-term importance on school outcomes is just beginning (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006). So far, researchers have found that gifted students with high hope achieve successful school-related outcomes, demonstrate higher success on standardized achievement tests (Snyder, 1997), and set higher global academic goals and expectancies of success (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997). Students with low hope have a higher occur-
High-hope students don’t belittle themselves when they’re not successful. They don’t let their failures affect their ultimate sense of worth, but rather attribute their failure to a lack of effort or strategies for success (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003). High-hope students have superior academic and interpersonal satisfactions when compared to those who have low hope.

Researchers have also examined levels of hopefulness and the contribution hope makes to personal well-being in college freshman honors and early entrants, with a subsequent check in during their sophomore year (Boazman, 2010). Findings include:

• Being hopeful was strongly associated with positive personal well-being.
• Gifted students who enter college with a higher sense of hope experience greater positive feelings of overall personal well-being initially and after one year in college (Boazman, 2010; Boazman, Saylor, & Eastonbrooks, 2012).
• Honors college students who enter college with a strong ability to identify multiple paths toward goals appear to have moved toward achieving those goals after one year of college.

Increasing Student Hope

Although children in America generally feel hopeful (Snyder et al., 2003), all children do not have the same level of hopefulness. At times, gifted children can find themselves in settings that are socially and intellectually stagnant. Gifted students may have a hard time finding intellectual peers and stimulating cognitive challenges commensurate with their abilities in a regular classroom (Gross, 2004). Therefore, school can seem hopeless without goal-setting skills, without identifying paths to attain goals, and with low confidence toward accomplishing goals. Ideally, parents, teachers, and counselors should collaborate to help the child develop goal-setting skills and to identify pathways that will lead to goal attainment. As a team, they should create a plan and process in moving forward to support the child’s efforts toward accomplishing those goals.

Setting goals. Teaching goal setting is foundational to assisting gifted children in their development of hopefulness. Gifted children need to be active participants in setting their own personal, social, and academic goals. In early grades, gifted students should be encouraged to set simple, clear, specific goals that move them toward getting something accomplished (approach goals) rather than avoiding something (avoidance goals). As the child ages, goal setting can become more complex. Listing and ranking goals help students learn the skill of prioritizing. Setting multiple goals should be encouraged in middle and high school, as multiple goals offer a fallback position if students encounter a difficult obstacle. Students must also be taught how to identify and set markers of success.

Developing pathways thinking. Parents and educators can help gifted students develop pathways thinking by breaking down larger goals into smaller components that are approached, and eventually completed, in a sequenced and logical way. Students should identify multiple routes to both small and large goals and practice overcoming obstacles. This teaches them to become flexible thinkers. When students become stuck, it’s important they do not attribute the inability to move forward to a lack of talent. Rather, students should see obstructions as pathways that do not work. If a pathway is identified as unfeasible, students must learn the skills to switch lanes and find alternate routes to take them toward their goal.

Developing personal meaning or “agency” thinking. It’s essential that children set goals that are their own—with personal meaning—rather than assume the goals of their peers, teachers, or parents. Motivation, persistence, and performance are undermined if the goals are not personal. Gifted children should also set “stretch” goals, keep a journal of internal dialogue, and engage in team-related activities to foster personal meaning. In addition, developing memories of positive experiences, either through personal successes or by example of others, helps keep gifted children resilient when they face difficulty reaching their goals.

The aim of those who parent and educate gifted individuals is for academic success and happiness, so students flourish throughout their lives. Hope, when framed as a goal-directed and active process, helps students thrive academically and personally. Hope, then, is much more than wishful thinking about a positive outcome. When the gifted are able...
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to set goals, see multiple routes to goals, and can move toward the attainment of those goals, then they have hope for reaching their goals. So, the next time you use or hear the word hope, think twice about what it means and your role in helping those who are hopeful attain their goals.

References

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**Author’s Note**

Janette Boazman, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of education at University of Dallas. She holds a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction and a M.S. in educational psychology. She is a mother of a gifted son and an advocate for all gifted individuals. Her research centers on the personal and psychological well-being of the gifted.
All parents, though, eventually enlist master teachers to teach their children, often at the suggestion of the former coach. Master teachers are International Grandmasters, national or world champion twirlers, skaters with Olympic experience, and musicians employed at leading universities or conservatories.

Securing elite coaching does not come easily or cheaply. One skating family relocated hundreds of miles from their home so their son could work with a top coach. The parent of a violinist flies with her son across country every week so that he can study with a top-flight music coach. Another music parent accompanies her son to a summer-long music camp because he is too young to attend alone. Lessons, meanwhile, cost about $100 per hour, with several lessons required per week. To secure and pay for top coaches, many families make sacrifices such as borrowing money, forgoing retirement savings, living in smaller homes, and taking second jobs. A skating mom said bluntly: “This is an ungodly expensive sport. It really is. I can’t tell you how many times we remortgaged our house.” A cello player’s parent remarked, “We decided that money wasn’t going to keep him from working with a certain teacher, so we lived off borrowed money for a time.”

6. Support Singleness of Purpose
Long and daily practice sessions, lessons with mentors, and numerous competitions leave talented individuals with little time for outside activities. But, most prefer it that way. They have a singleness of purpose. When I asked chess parents why their talented kids spent so much time on chess, all credited the child’s chess passion. One parent remarked: “He is passionate about it, just thrilled by it. It gives him a lot of joy and satisfaction, and he’s not really happy when he’s not playing. If someone were to take chess away from him, he just wouldn’t be a complete person. We once took chess away and he was miserable; it was like yanking out the soul.”

To most people, such single-mindedness seems unnatural or unhealthy. Still, a pinpoint focus is the hallmark of talent. Talent experts such as Gladwell perhaps sum things up best when they say talented individuals simply practice a lot because they want to and like to practice. Their hard work and singleness of purpose is the product of a rage to learn and master.

In my work, parents play a central role in their children’s single-minded pursuit of talent. They are often high achievers themselves, and they espouse and model a hard-work ethic. They strive for excellence, set no limits, and teach that no goal is impossible.

Parents also support their children’s single-mindedness by being single-minded about talent development. In Poker terms, parents go all in. They recognize the rarity of their child’s talent and their responsibility to nurture it. One parent said, “I’ve made a commitment to him that as long as he continues to work and grow and do his best, we’ll use whatever resources we have to get him where he wants to go.”

7. Make Full Commitment
All parents I interviewed describe a full commitment to talent development. In some cases, they support alternate education options or even put school on the back burner. One parent arranged for his son to delay ninth grade to pursue chess full time for a year. Another chess parent advocated delaying college for a year to study chess intensively. Other families choose to homeschool or have their children miss school—sometimes for weeks—to attend competitions.

Parents also take on roles beyond normal parenthood. They act as coach, accountant, fund-raiser, secretary, hairstylist, costume designer, press agent, travel agent, travel companion, medical assistant, dietician, chauffeur, school liaison, videographer, gopher, and practice monitor. No job is too big or too small. Parents often described their collective duties as a second or full-time job.

One skating mom said: “I’m the one who signed him up for ballet or off-ice conditioning. I was involved in the costume design, finding the costume maker, and narrowing down music choices for the program. I contact specialists, do all drug testing paperwork, flight arrangements, hotel arrangements, and rental cars. I’m like his personal secretary. I’m his assistant. For half the day, all I do is skating work.”

The parent of a young writer who quit her job to foster her daughter’s talent said,
“It’s a full-time job—sometimes even more than full-time—and can be hard. But the reason I keep doing it is that I don’t just manage somebody. The person I manage is my daughter.”

Final Thoughts
The road to excellence is passable for those who discover their element, gain early access to the talent domain, link to a center of excellence, engage in deliberate practice, work with top coaches, and have a singleness of purpose. No child, though, can complete this journey alone. A fully committed parent must help at every turn. But, regardless of how far the road is traveled, parents contend that the joys and benefits from talent development come as much from the journey as the destination. Parents discover that the pursuit of talent brings them closer as a family. One parent remarked, “Because he’s my son and I want him to be whatever he can be. And, if that happens to be chess, then that’s what I want for him. I want him to be happy. I love him, and I love his chess too.”

Parents also discover that the pursuit of talent brings them closer as a family. One parent remarked, “I have no regrets because every single thing that I did [to help develop talent] has brought my son into my life. Everything that seemed to be a mistake or a hardship or a sacrifice was the right thing done at the right time. I felt lucky to share this with my son.”

As for why parents make the commitments and sacrifices they do, one chess parent said this: “Because he’s my son and I want him to be whatever he can be. And, if that happens to be chess, then that’s what I want for him. I want him to be happy. I love him, and I love his chess too.”

References

Author’s Note
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