

# GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

## Are You a Demanding Parent?

By David Benzel

If you had to choose between having a child that is “smart” or a child that is “good,” which would you choose? Is it a perplexing question for you? In this context the “smart” option refers to a child’s ability to perform well. The “good” option refers to a child’s ability to behave well. Whichever is more important to you has a lot to do with the messages you send through your parenting style.

It’s been said that good parents are demanding of their children. Perhaps we should ask, “Demanding about what?”

### **Demanding About Behavior**

I believe we fulfill our responsibility as parents when we are demanding about character issues and behavior issues. We are meant to examine the choices our children make to see if they reflect the values of our family. This assumes that those values demonstrate respect for self and others and do not harm others. Demanding adherence to these standards of behavior benefits the child, and benefits the society in which he or she participates. Everybody wins.

This brand of demanding by parents is actually well-received by children (eventually, if not at the moment) when it includes the WHY of it all. Lessons of self-discipline, personal responsibility, and delayed gratification are learned easiest when kids understand the connection between the expected behavior and the impact inappropriate behavior has on others. If we truly want our children committed to behaving well – not just compliant – it will require our ability to explain WHY it matters. Do we want civilized behavior from our kids because they *have to*, or because they *want to do* the right thing?

Research by Samuel and Pearl Oliner found that parents who used reasoning in disciplining their children encouraged voluntary compliance with rules that aligned with important values. These same children are also more likely to question rules that don’t align with their values.

### **Demanding About Performance**

There is another brand of demanding by parents that can have a negative impact on children. I’m referring to when parents *demand* that their child be smart in the classroom, coordinated in sports, articulate in drama, and/or a virtuoso in music. A parent’s drive for their child to perform well reflects a self-serving and egotistical motive by a parent, although it is usually disguised as, “I just want my child to succeed.” Here’s a list of typical Wants by parents who demand high performance.

#### **I want my child to:**

- To play well
- To win

- To improve quickly
- To impress others
- To move up
- To receive recognition
- To be a STAR!

The problem with this list is that someone other than the parent must achieve greatness for the parent to be satisfied. If we ask the WHY question, it appears the parent is the beneficiary more than the child. Pressure to perform is the reality for a child in this scenario. The quest for perfection paves the way for inevitable depression and frustration. Children do not knowingly volunteer for this journey. They will often comply to please their parents, but that is not the same as a commitment to work hard. Without a choice, there is no freedom to perform; only an expectation to deliver.

### **Conclusion**

Are you a demanding parent? If so, are you demanding about behaviors you believe in, or about performances you want? Do you run your family with rules and schedules, or is everyone guided by “our values” and allowed to make choices?

Imagine your child is a young tennis player, and you are watching a match in which he or she loses by double faulting on the final point. Imagine your child reacting by slamming the racquet on the ground repeatedly. Here’s the question: Will your follow-up conversation be about the cause of the double fault, or about the temper tantrum that followed? What’s most important to you about your child’s development – behavior or performance?

There are two lessons to be learned in this example. One is about the technique required for an accurate serve under pressure; the other is about controlling one’s temper, resisting impulses, and showing respect to your opponent. Which lesson do you feel has the greatest long-term benefits for your child’s development? Which lesson deserves YOUR attention as a demanding parent?

[CLICK HERE](#) to ask David Benzel a question about this topic:

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