
FROM A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Children on Stage: The Evolving Sense of Identity

Sir Noël Coward, sophisticated wit and accomplished playwright, is said to have reported on the response of a veteran actor regarding a particular teenage prodigy who had stolen a scene from him by remarking, "Two things need to be cut from the play, the second act and that youngster's throat."

The role that performing arts and athletics plays in the development of our children is the stuff that a wide range of parental reactions are made of. All performances and events begin with great pride and a sense of accomplishment as the parents greet each other with pleasantries and words of encouragement for the prodigy; when deep down you know that you are entering an arena where each parent is assured a range of emotions over the pending performance of their respective child. Will they remember their lines? Will they trip over the costume too hastily constructed? Will they run from the stage stricken with stage fright? Will they drop the ball or fail to make the critical play thus becoming the target of disdain? As they settle in, parents, particularly fathers, sport an assured sense of pending accomplishment on your face, but fear in your heart the potential for embarrassment looms enhanced by the fact that you have just spotted your boss in the audience. A few quiet prayers follow and the curtain rises or the blare of the first whistle. Show time!

Such is the plight of parents nurturing their children through that seemingly endless series of live performances and games featuring their child's budding talents or lack thereof. Parents, facing the pain of the "sawing" by their child through their first half dozen violin recitals, only end up admitting by mutual agreement that the violin just isn't their instrument. On we go in the search for that perfect instrument or sport so fitting their heretofore hidden talents.

As they grow and parents become conditioned to their less-than-stellar performances, a certain sense of sophistication and self-assuredness emerges in the child's efforts. Parents respond by narrowing the after-school chaos so common to baby boomers where they immerse their children in every conceivable activity in favor of a focus on what brings a sparkle to their child's eye and regardless of the level of excellence demonstrated, represents one of life's important lessons - the level of performance is often less important than the love of performance. Parents soon learn that through performance on stage or on

the field of play, children grow in their confidence and pride in their accomplishments; likewise parents fulfill their role of imprinting their child's personality with an experience that will serve them well in the years to come. One only hopes that their budding self-confidence and sense of self will inspire the equally high performance that so frustrated Sir Noël's contemporary and so thrills the parents of the prodigy.

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