

Nature and Nurture: Why both are important in raising an exceptional child

PARENTING

ARTICLE

JUN 6, 2023

Unlocking the Potential: The Dynamic Interplay of Nature and Nurture in Nurturing an Exceptional Child

Reasons why both nurture and nature are important in raising an exceptional child.

How much of your child's personality and behaviour is biological, and how much can you change? This question is at the core of the "nature versus nurture" debate that you might have heard of at some point in your parenting journey. So what is it that helps shape an exceptional child? The answer might surprise you.

First, let's define what "nature" and "nurture" are. "Nature" refers to your child's genetic makeup and brain function. It's what determines the colour of his/her eyes and how tall he/she'll be. It also determines if he/she'll be innately happy, or easily agitated. Simply put, "nature" means: "they were born this way."

"Nurture", on the other hand, is related to the environment in which children are raised. It could be the type of parenting philosophy you follow to raise your little one, the kind of interactions he/she has while growing up, and the culture he/she are exposed to. "Nurture" also includes the kind of friends your child has.

Scientists, teachers, and psychologists have had many discussions over which trumps the other: is it Nature or Nurture? Some believe that if Nature handed you an unlucky card, no amount of environmental factors can change the child's fate. They may argue that the best school, loving families and supportive friends cannot change people with violent social behaviour -- they are congenitally wired to be like that. The same goes for intrinsically happy people—even if natural disasters may take away every worldly possession, they're still all smiles.

On the other hand, others believe that Nurture can change the outcome of a child, even if all genetic odds seem not to be in favour of him/her. Many argue that children in the foster system who have abusive parents (and therefore, potentially carry "violent" genes, too) who get placed in loving, supportive families end up being successful in life. There are also those who grow up in supportive environments who associate the wrong set of friends, ultimately veering off-path.

So which of the two really shapes a child?

Striking a balance between Nature and Nurture

Believe it or not, both Nature and Nurture are crucial in raising your child to meet his or her fullest potential. American psychologist Jerome Kagan said, "nature and nurture work together to produce a personality the way humidity and cold come together to generate snow." The two work in tandem; and as parents, it's our responsibility to play off both sides to ensure our children grow up to be exceptional individuals.

Genes may be responsible for your child's hair colour and temperament, but it's his/her experiences in an environment with supportive and responsive caregivers that shape your child to realize full genetic potential. The truth is, a child's bond with his/her caregiver can influence the development of social behaviour.



When researcher Nathan Fox visited a Romanian orphanage in 1999, he found that the child lying in cribs were quiet and calm—the exact opposite of how you would expect an abandoned child would act. He later found out that this behaviour was brought about because the children realized that no one would come to their aid even if they cried. This experience launched the Bucharest Early Intervention Project, where researchers studied the children who were adopted and those who were left at the orphanage. What they found was astonishing: those who were not raised in a family setting had a noticeable change in white matter—nerves that are critical for cognition—in their brains. On the other hand, those who were adopted had similar white matter make-up as children who grew up with their biological families. It was clear as day: neglect (Nurture) could affect a child's brain development (Nature.) Equally, love, care and support (also Nurture) could also influence a child's brain development (Nature) - but positively.

It's quite clear: when it comes to helping your children reach their full genetic potential, it's crucial that you provide your little ones with an environment that will draw out the exceptional in them.

Give them love, support, and opportunities to excel no matter what their temperament is. Every child is good at something, and when you provide a caring

environment, that ability which is perhaps genetically determined will be identified and nurtured. At the same time, nourish your children's bodies and minds with a balanced diet. By doing all this, know that you're raising a confident, intelligent, empathetic child, with shining talent and a leader in the making. Such a child is truly exceptional, and will undoubtedly be equipped with the skills needed to succeed in life, now and in the future.