

Collaboration vs. Control

Throughout my writing in *Christian School Comment*, I have often referenced the biblical directive to parents from Proverbs 22:6 (NIV): “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” This passage makes clear the kind of training we are responsible for giving our children. Someone has said that there is a great difference between teaching children how to use a spoon and teaching them how

Successful parents understand that their feelings and behaviors directly impact their children’s feelings and behaviors. They emphasize collaboration and cooperation, not control.

—Alexandra Barzvi

to use a pencil. And the understanding by parents of that difference may determine for their children what will happen at home and what will happen at school.

Choosing Christian schooling for your children is clearly more than a simple decision to select an agency—a school to teach the “pencil stuff.” When you choose a Christian school, you choose a distinctive kind of school—that is, one dealing also in spiritual formation. And you believe that spiritual formation is an essential part of education. You have made a great decision. Spiritual formation is essential. During this school year, I have written several times about parents’ appropriate engagement with their children’s school. Earlier I wrote about being a hovering parent—popularly referred to as “helicopter parenting.” A synonymous term, *hyperparenting*, is another way of referring to parents who are overly involved with their children. And the involvement is not just in the classroom, a fact made evident by the recent accounts of brutal attacks on children’s sports league coaches by overly engaged fathers.

Alexandra Barzvi, PhD, a clinical psychiatrist who specializes in adolescent and family treatment at New York University Child Study Center, states that “hyperparenting means being overly involved, overly controlling,

and overly stimulating. Overly involved parents usually hover over their children and make day-to-day decisions for them: what to eat, what to wear, what to do after school, who to play with.” She believes that this kind of parenting actually begins as good parenting, as the desire of parents to create a perfect world and to meet every need of their children. These parents believe that their children should experience no frustration and no pain. So, in order to achieve such an ideal experience, the parents must micromanage every aspect of their children’s lives—social, academic, and athletic (AboutOurKids.org, *Are You an Overly Involved Parent?* 2006).

One of the greatest desires of many parents is that their children will be happy. But the definition of *happiness* today is not congruent with the classical definition of *happiness*. The classical definition of *happiness* is the one the Declaration of Independence refers to when it assures Americans of the right to “the pursuit of happiness.” In the book *The Lost Virtue of Happiness*, J. P. Moreland and Klaus Issler point out that the happiness referenced then was based on “the classical understanding of happiness proclaimed by Moses, Solomon, Jesus, Aristotle, Plato, the church fathers and medieval theologians, and many more—the understanding that has recently been replaced by ‘pleasurable satisfaction.’ According to the ancients, happiness is *a life well lived, a life of virtue and character, a life that manifests wisdom, kindness, and goodness*. For them, the life of happiness—the life to dream and fantasize about, to hunger and seek after, to imitate and practice—is a life of virtue and character. At its core, such a life includes a very deep sense of well-being” (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006, 25; italics in original).

If parents desire that their children experience a perfect world in the real world, then that desire will most often create a confrontational and combative relationship with teachers who hold children accountable for their actions, whether teachers require this accountability in academic matters or in social situations such as those on the playground or in an athletic contest. On the other hand, if parents have a willingness to view their relationship with the school as one of collaboration in the nurture and development of their children intellectually and spiritually, then those parents are on the right course toward being engaged parents—in an appropriate way and with unbelievable benefits for their children.



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