Kind, gentle parenting works too

Amy Chua, a Harvard-educated Yale law professor, recently ignited a firestorm on the mama-circuit when excerpts from her book, "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" were published in the Wall Street Journal. Her memoir provides an unvarnished accounting of the brutal methods of parenting that Ms. Chua inherited from her Asian immigrant parents to secure entry into the Ivy League and other societal indications of superior achievement.

In Ms. Chua's own parenting endeavor, she became a "Tiger Mother" obsessed with ensuring that her own two daughters would become a piano virtuoso and a star violinist. While her eldest daughter did, in fact, perform at Carnegie Hall at 14 years of age, the tactics used in the process appear to be near-abusive, at least through the lens of modern American parenting.

For example, in one parenting experience with her youngest daughter, Ms. Chua threatened to give her daughter's beloved dollhouse to the Salvation Army "piece by piece" if she did not master a particular arrangement before her music lesson the next day. She then worked with her daughter straight through dinnertime and refused to allow her daughter to get up to get a drink or even go to the bathroom until her daughter finally mastered the difficult piece later that night. In the end, the daughter was pleased with the achievement and wanted to play the piece again.

In other examples, Ms. Chua's daughters were not allowed to attend sleepovers, have playdates, get anything less than an 'A,' or be in a school play. They also were not allowed to watch TV or play computer games (of course, many of us would agree with those restrictions). Nor were they allowed to choose their own extracurricular activities.

Ms. Chua called her eldest daughter "garbage" at one point, just as her own father had. She told her youngest daughter on another occasion to stop being lazy, cowardly, self-indulgent and pathetic. When her husband urged her to stop insulting her daughter, Ms. Chua denied that she was being insulting; she was "motivating" her. No wonder she describes her home at times as a war zone.

Does it really take this level of dominance, verbal abuse and hyper-parenting to get into the Ivy League? Of course not, and that really should be the goal of parents? Isn't it enough to raise our children to be happy, healthy, hardworking and kind individuals?

Like Ms. Chua, I, too, got into the Holy Grail of the Ivy League, but I never played Carnegie Hall. In fact, when I begged and pleaded and finally persuaded my own mother to register me for a guitar class through the local parks and recreation program in Van Nuys, I was unable to play, let alone master, "Mr. Bojangles." Nonetheless, my mother let me eat dinner, drink water, and go to the bathroom, indulgent parent that she was, and Harvard thought I was swell enough to let in anyway.

Sure, there were some "Tiger Mother" moments in my childhood. My father expected all of us to get good grades and spanked us if we did not. I did well, and he was pleased with the achievement and wanted to play the piece again. And again. And again.

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