Opinion: Parents need to give kids space to grow

By Madeline Levine

The brief reprieve of summer is almost over, and parents everywhere are bracing themselves for the return to school. Back to the homework wars, the grade worries and the endless carpools to a dizzying array of extracurricular activities. Back to the feeling that we have to be ever-vigilant in order to optimize our children's performance and hoping that somewhere down the line, whether that's this year or in a decade, it will all pay off with a letter of acceptance (preferably several) from a prestigious college or university.

We're worried and, in light of the miserable economy and the reality of global competition, with good reason. We want to make certain that in uncertain times, our kids have a leg up. But here's the irony: Our constant oversight, our over-parenting isn't doing what we think it's doing. Rather than giving our kids a leg up, it's making them less resilient, less resourceful and less engaged with learning. In other words, over-parenting makes our kids less, not more, likely to succeed.

Counterintuitive as it seems, the very things we're doing to secure our children's futures can end up compromising them. Pushing and over-scheduling prevent them from becoming competent adults capable of the resilience, perseverance, motivation and grit that business leaders say they'll need to compete in tomorrow's workforce. Just as importantly, it interferes with the ability to cultivate healthy relationships and to feel that life is meaningful.

Many parents have significant misunderstandings about how children learn and what circumstances are likely to drive

success in them. Our (culturally sanctioned) faulty thinking is pushing us to do, in many cases, the exact opposite of what kids need to thrive.

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