

WHY NURTURING EMPATHY IN CHILDREN IS KEY

We are raising an ambitious generation. Our children want to excel, lead and achieve more than we did. Parents sacrifice greatly to give them good schools, wider exposure and brighter futures. Society applauds achievement. Schools celebrate distinctions. Universities reward innovation. But in the race to succeed, one important question must not be ignored: What happens when ambition grows faster than character?

We are sending our children back to school in Senior One and Senior Five. Soon, we will be preparing others for higher institutions of learning.

However, I want us to keep reflecting on our parenting journey and the nation we are building. What kind of society are we becoming? And more personally, what kind of adults are we preparing? Moments of joy can steer good memories, but moments of grief have a way of slowing us down.

SUCCESS WITHOUT RESTRAINT

Ambition is powerful. It motivates children to work hard. However, ambition alone does not teach empathy. It does not automatically produce integrity. It does not cultivate restraint. A child can be intelligent and still lack compassion. A young adult can be strategic and still lack moral boundaries. A professional can be accomplished and yet lack conscience. When children are praised only for grades and trophies, they may absorb a dangerous lesson: outcomes matter more than values. Over time, performance



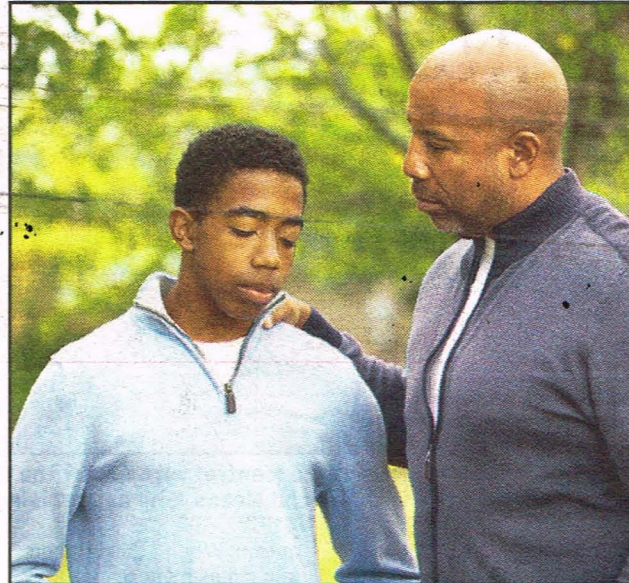
**PARENTING
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becomes the measure of worth and short-cuts begin to look acceptable if they guarantee advancement. The problem is not ambition, it is ambition without an internal compass.

WINNING AT ALL COSTS

Many homes unintentionally communicate that winning is everything. We compare siblings. We measure children against peers. We speak of success as if it were the ultimate proof of good parenting. In such an environment, children may begin to believe that falling behind is equivalent to failing in life. When pressure intensifies, some young people learn to hide mistakes rather than admit them. They may compete harshly instead of collaborating kindly. They may prioritise personal advancement without considering who might be affected along the way.

If integrity is not intentionally elevated above



A father counselling his child after a clash with his colleagues. Nurturing empathy in children turns them into responsible and emotionally-intelligent adults

applause, ambition can slowly detach from responsibility.

Decisions do not end with the individual who makes them. They echo into families, communities and sometimes the lives of children who must carry consequences they did not create. Let us teach children to value life more than winning all the time.

ORDINARY MOMENTS

Character is rarely built on graduation day. It is formed quietly in ordinary family interactions. It grows when a child tells the truth, even when it is uncomfortable. It deepens when parents model honesty in small matters like finances. It strengthens when children see adults apologise and take responsibility for mistakes. If ambition is loudly celebrated, but character is

separate them, but help them understand each other's hurt. When society faces painful events, we should not scroll past them but use them as opportunities to discuss dignity, empathy and consequences.

SHARP MINDS, WEAK CONVICTIONS

Our education system does an excellent job of sharpening intellect. It trains analytical thinkers and competitive achievers. But intellect without conviction can be misdirected. History consistently shows that intelligence alone does not prevent harm. In fact, intelligence without moral grounding can become more efficient at wrongdoing. That is why some intelligent people are the ones planning evil.

The goal of parenting and education should not simply be to produce capable individuals, but safe human beings. Children must understand that success without integrity is fragile. Influence without empathy is destructive. Achievement without conscience eventually collapses. We must raise children who ask not only, "How far can I go?" but also, "Should I go there?"

BALANCE AT HOME

Balancing ambition and character requires deliberate effort. We must redefine success in our homes. Celebrate honesty as loudly as high grades. Applaud kindness as visibly as competition wins. Let children see that character earns approval, not just performance. We must model restraint. Children observe

how we speak about others, how we handle conflict and how we respond to temptation. If they see us compromise values for convenience, they learn that ambition justifies short-cuts.

TEACH LONG-TERM THINKING

Every decision carries consequences beyond the present moment. Helping children imagine the ripple effects of their choices even in adulthood strengthens their conscience.

It trains them to consider not only personal gain but also collective impact. Ambition guided by character produces leaders who build. Ambition without character produces people who rise quickly, but fall painfully.

THE ADULTS WE ARE PREPARING

Every generation reflects what it was taught to value. If we prioritise speed over depth, results over integrity and recognition over responsibility, we should not be surprised when imbalance appears.

However, if we anchor ambition in moral clarity, we raise adults who are both capable and compassionate. Adults who understand that success is meaningful only when it does not come at the expense of others and that human dignity is not negotiable.

Grief has a way of reminding us that life is fragile and that choices matter deeply. The death tragedies we see now are a result of ambitions to achieve something at any cost.

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THE FINAL WORD

As we pursue excellence for our children, may we not neglect the deeper work of shaping their hearts. Ambition is a gift. Character is a safeguard. One without the other is incomplete. The responsibility rests with us.

softly mentioned, imbalance begins. An imbalance in childhood often becomes instability in adulthood.

Parents must go beyond correction and enter conversation. When children lie, we should not only "punish" but also discuss trust. When siblings quarrel, we should not merely