US THERAPY SINGAPORE

TOXIC OVERACHIEVEMENT CULTURE - WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO HELP PROTECT OUR CHILDREN (AND OURSELVES!)

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Today, Dr Emma Waddington (Clinical Psychologist) explored the growing issue of toxic overachievement culture and its impact on children, parents, and families. She spoke about how society's obsession with success, performance, and external validation has created a cycle of constant striving that harms both mental health and well-being.

WHAT IS TOXIC OVERACHIEVEMENT CULTURE?

Toxic overachievement culture refers to the pressure placed on children to constantly excel in academic, athletic, and social spheres—often at the expense of their emotional health and sense of self-worth. This culture values accomplishments and external markers of success above all else, leaving little room for children to develop a healthy sense of self or to experience failure as part of growth.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The roots of this culture lie in societal shifts over the past few decades, including the increasing competitiveness of education, the rise of social media, and the constant messaging that success is the only route to happiness. Parents, driven by the desire to give their children every advantage and avoid setbacks, may unknowingly feed into this cycle by over-scheduling activities, over-emphasizing grades, and associating worth with achievement.



THE COST OF TOXIC OVERACHIEVEMENT CULTURE

For **parents**:

- **Increased Stress**: Parents often feel the pressure to “keep up” with other families, leading to burnout and anxiety about their children's future.
- **Strained Relationships**: Overemphasis on success can create emotional distance between parents and children, leaving parents feeling disconnected from their children's true needs.

For **children**:

- **Burnout**: Constant striving for perfection can lead to exhaustion, anxiety, and depression.
- **Identity Crisis**: Children may come to believe their worth is defined by their achievements, rather than their intrinsic qualities, leading to a lack of self-esteem.
- **Fear of Failure**: When children are taught that mistakes are unacceptable, they may develop a deep fear of failure, which stifles creativity and emotional resilience.

THE FRAMEWORK OF MATTERING

There is a way out of this cycle and that is to develop a culture of mattering into our families.



The framework of **mattering** emphasizes that children need to feel seen, heard, and valued for who they are—not just for what they do.

This sense of mattering fosters **connection, emotional safety, and a sense of belonging**.

When children feel they matter, they develop a more resilient sense of self and healthier relationships.

TIPS FOR PARENTS ON HOW TO USE THE MATTERING FRAMEWORK AT HOME

1. **Focus on Effort, Not Just Outcomes**: Praise the effort, perseverance, and process rather than only the result. Encourage your child to take risks and learn from mistakes.
2. **Create Space for Open Dialogue**: Regularly check in with your child about their feelings, struggles, and successes—make sure they know they have a safe space to express themselves.
3. **Be Present, Not Perfect**: Demonstrate unconditional love and support, even when your child doesn't meet your expectations. Let them know they matter to you regardless of their performance.
4. **Encourage Autonomy**: Allow your child to explore their own interests and passions, without the pressure to excel at everything. This helps them form their own identity beyond their achievements.

Although there is a lot we can do at home to support our children, there may be a point at which we or our child may benefit from support from a psychologist or Counsellor.

SIGNS YOU AND YOUR CHILD MAY BENEFIT FROM ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:

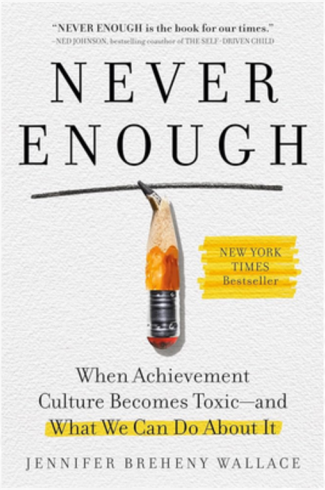
- **Chronic Anxiety or Stress**: If either you or your child are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or constantly anxious about performance, it may be time to seek additional help.
- **Emotional Withdrawal:** If your child seems emotionally distant or disconnected, or if you're finding it hard to connect with them, it may signal that the overachievement culture is taking a toll.
- **Fear of Failure**: If your child exhibits extreme fear of making mistakes or avoids challenges altogether, they may need support in developing a healthier approach to failure and growth.
- **Physical Symptoms of Stress:** Complaints about headaches, stomachaches, or other physical signs of stress can often be linked to emotional strain caused by toxic achievement pressures.

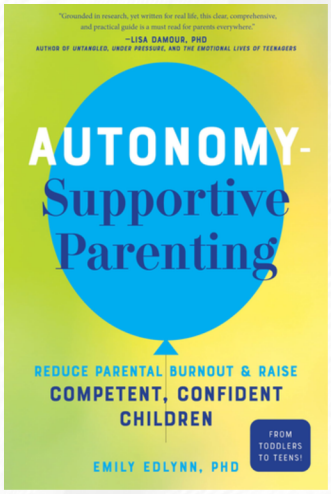
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By shifting the focus from achievement to mattering, parents can help create a healthier environment for their children—one that nurtures their emotional well-being and supports their development into resilient, confident individuals.

Some additional resources:
Book - Never Enough by Jennifer Wallace
Book - Autonomy Supportive Parenting by Emily Edlyn
Podcasts - Never Enough with Psychologists off the clock
Podcasts - Perfectionism with Life's Dirty Little Secrets

Click here to get our list of 16 language reminders to improve conversations with your child!







If you'd like to learn more or consult a professional, please reach out to Us on Whatsapp at **+65 8118 5590** or email **hello@us-therapy.sg**.

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