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[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [COUNSELLING](#) [PRESENTATIONS](#) [KID'S BEST BET](#) [EVENTS](#) [CONTACT](#)

The Miracle of Maturation

Learning | Maturation

An apple seed doesn't look anything like an apple and it is amazing that a whole tree can come from such a tiny object. I still remember my delight as a child in realizing this very basic principle of life.

In thinking about raising a child it is incredible to think about their innate potential that lies waiting to be realized. However, just as a robust apple seed falling on sterile ground will not reach its potential, this is also true for our children. The realization of potential relies on having the right conditions for growth and this is where we come in as parents, caregivers, and teachers. The question is how do we help get them there?

Part of our job rests in acknowledging we are not in control of the maturation process and that we can only provide the conditions that give rise to it. They will learn to walk, talk, read, ride a bike when they are ready and the conditions are in place. We can support their development, provide shelter, safety, food, encourage, direct, teach, provide love and care, but we are wise to leave Mother Nature to do her part too.

When it comes to our children we can so easily be swept away and start to engage in practices that are based in a belief that we can somehow push their maturation process. While at my daughter's school the other day I had the pleasure of witnessing the kindergarteners host their first school assembly. My daughter rehearsed for a week, diligently memorizing her one line. When the big day came she recited her piece at the school assembly beautifully and then passed the microphone on to her friend who then began to read a paragraph from her cue card. As the microphone went down the kindergarten line I was amazed at the number of children who were already reading. Part of me wondered whether my lack of pushing my daughter to read had somehow done her a disservice. While she has been exposed to books from a young age and loves to read stories, despite knowing her letters and sounds she does not consider herself to be a reader.



Despite my best intentions and fierce struggle to avoid comparing my child's development against that of another child, from time to time I can still find myself sucked into this vortex. When I am there I call the gardener in me to the surface and ask her whether I am providing the conditions for my daughter to grow? Am I tending to that which I can and do I have faith that things will unfold as they should and according to mother nature's plan? As I answer a resounding yes to all of these things I realize how easy it is to be swept away and to compare my daughter to the other seeds around her, seeing her as somehow lacking because she is different in her in growth. The reality is that she is not lacking, she is growing up just as she should and it is me that has momentarily lost my way in thinking that every child will grow the same way. There are some plants that are known for their ease and delight just as there are those that are more high maintenance and will reward you with the most magnificent of blooms.

My role as a parent is to play midwife to my daughter's maturation, I cannot command it, demand it or call it forth at my will. Sometimes I need to remind myself of the apple seed and stay focused on the miracle of maturation that exists all around me.

Copyright Deborah MacNamara, PhD, Kid's Best Bet – *Dr. Deborah MacNamara is a counsellor in private practice and on faculty at the Neufeld Institute. She works with parents, educators, child-care and mental health professionals in making sense of kids from the inside out. See www.macnamara.ca or www.neufeldinstitute.com for more information.*

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