



The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2025

Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

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MORE THAN MILESTONES – CREATING CHILDHOOD WITH MEANING

~ *Pranjal Arora*

In today's achievement-obsessed world, I often pause and wonder: Are we truly letting our children live their childhood, or are we rushing them from one milestone to the next as if ticking off a to-do list? First smile, check. Walking by 12 months, check. Reading by 4, winning a prize by 6. But somewhere in the pursuit of these markers, I feel we're forgetting to give children what they really need—a childhood filled with meaning, warmth, freedom, and love.

As someone who spends time working with young children and guiding educators, I have seen both the beauty and the pressure of early childhood up close. And I've made it my purpose to stand firmly for the idea that childhood is not a race to the top, but a sacred journey that deserves space, care, and joy.

Childhood Is Not a Performance

One of my biggest concerns is how modern parenting and schooling often turn childhood into a performance. Children are burdened with expectations long before they understand their own emotions. There's pressure to excel, to stand out, to "do better" even when they're just learning how to tie their shoelaces. And while achievement has its place, I believe childhood should not be built solely on milestones. It should be built on meaning.

To me, meaning in childhood is about nurturing a child's inner world, not just monitoring their outer progress. It means asking, "How does this make them feel?" instead of only, "What did they learn?" It's about holding space for their questions, their confusions, their mistakes—without turning every experience into a lesson or a step toward the next goal.

Presence Over Perfection

Children don't remember the perfect meals, the expensive toys, or even the flashy birthday parties. They remember how we made them feel. They remember the warmth of our hugs, the

joy of silly dances in the living room, the calm in our eyes when they were scared. What they need is not our perfection, but our presence.

This is something I deeply value in how I treat children—being emotionally available. I choose to slow down when a child wants to tell me about a dream they had. I kneel down to their eye level, not because it's a textbook technique, but because it tells them, "I see you. I hear you. You matter." These gestures, however small, create a world of security and confidence in a child's heart.

Meaning Lies in the Little Things

We tend to forget that the most ordinary moments are the ones that shape a child's soul. Helping water the plants, making rotis with grandma, getting muddy in the garden, feeding the dog—all these small experiences are filled with meaning. They teach responsibility, patience, empathy, and connection.

When I guide caregivers or teachers, I remind them: every moment with a child is a chance to plant a seed—not for success, but for character. If a child is crying, hold space for their tears. If they are curious, let them explore—even if it means a mess. If they fail, celebrate their effort before correcting the mistake. That's how meaning is created—not by controlling their pace, but by respecting their process.

Emotionally Safe Spaces Matter

One of my core beliefs is that children flourish in emotionally safe spaces. And unfortunately, that's what many children today are missing. With all our good intentions, we sometimes create environments filled with correction, comparison, and competition. But children don't need to be fixed—they need to be understood.

I've made it a personal goal to create environments where children are not afraid to be wrong, not ashamed to be different, and not scared to express what they feel. Whether it's a classroom or a living room, I believe the space must be filled with warmth, trust, and encouragement.

I treat each child as an individual soul, not a project to perfect. Their worth is not dependent on how early they read or how neatly they write. Their worth lies in who they are becoming—kind, confident, and curious human beings.

Let's Redefine Success in Childhood

Success for a child should not be measured by medals, grades, or how many certificates decorate the fridge. I define success differently. A child who says “please” and “thank you,” who comforts a crying friend, who dares to try again after failing—that is success. A child who asks questions without fear, who daydreams wildly, who speaks their truth—that is success.

If we must chase milestones, let them be ones like “learned to share today,” “asked a deep question,” or “helped clean up after a mess.” These moments may not go into progress reports, but they are the roots of a grounded, meaningful life.

A Childhood to Remember

At the heart of everything I do, whether it’s teaching, guiding, writing, or simply being with children, is a silent promise: I want to be someone who gives children a childhood they can remember with love.

A childhood where mistakes were met with patience, not punishment.

Where questions were welcomed, not shut down.

Where emotions were honoured, not dismissed.

Where they were allowed to be loud, messy, silly, and slow.

Where they were not pushed to grow faster, but held gently while they bloomed.

Because when a child feels seen, heard, and valued just as they are, they grow up not just achieving great things, but becoming whole, compassionate human beings.

Final Thoughts

So, if you are a parent, a teacher, a caregiver—or simply someone who cares about the future generation—let us all take a step back. Let’s not measure children by milestones alone. Let’s give them something deeper.

Let’s give them the freedom to feel, to fail, to explore.

Let’s give them the assurance that they are loved, not for what they do, but for who they are.

Let’s help them build not just skills, but stories.

Let’s raise children who remember their childhood not as a race, but as a rich, beautiful chapter of joy, discovery, and deep connection.

Because at the end of the day, childhood is not about crossing finish lines.

It's about gathering moments that become the foundation of a meaningful life.

Let's create childhoods that are more than milestones—let's make them magical.