

10a Cruel to be kind

Reading

- 1 Work in pairs. Look at the photo and answer the questions.
 - 1 What is happening in the photo?
 - 2 How would you describe the mother's attitude: strict, intense, something else?
 - 3 How strict were your parents with you when you were young? Are you happy that they were this way or not?

- 2 Work in small groups. Discuss which of these things you think should be a) controlled strongly by parents; b) controlled a little by parents; or c) left to the child to decide?

- watching TV
- playing computer games
- practising a musical instrument
- going out to play with friends
- doing homework
- choosing what subjects to study at high school
- choosing extracurricular activities

- 3 Read the article and find out who *tiger mothers* are. What are their attitudes to the first five items in Exercise 2? How do these compare to the attitudes of a typical western mother?
- 4 What does the writer say about the results of the *tiger mother* approach to child-rearing? Does she approve or not? Do you agree with her?

Vocabulary raising children: verbs

- 5 Work in pairs. Look at the pairs of verbs below and discuss the difference between them. You will find the first verb in each pair in the article.
 - 1 *bring up* and *educate* children
 - 2 *praise* and *reward* good behaviour
 - 3 *rebel against* and *disobey* your parents
 - 4 *push* and *discipline* yourself
 - 5 *give in to* and *spoil* your children
 - 6 *nag* and *pester* someone
 - 7 *shame* and *punish* someone

C R U E L T O B E K I N D

Is there a right way to bring up children? Some parents read guides to find an answer, many just follow their instinct. Whatever they do, a doubt always remains: could I have done a better job?

A recent contribution to the subject is Amy Chua's controversial book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, which describes the approach to child-rearing of an ambitious Chinese parent living in the West. According to Chua, western mothers are far too soft on their children. She says they are always praising their children for every effort they make, even if the result is coming last in a race or playing a piano piece badly. These are the kind of parents who will give in to their children's demands to go out and play rather than do their homework, if they protest loud enough.

The *tiger mother* method is very different and the key is total control. *Tiger mothers* will accept nothing less than 'A' grades in every subject – failure to achieve these is just proof that they have not worked hard enough. They will encourage not with praise and reward, but by punishing and shaming. Chua told her own daughter that she would take her doll's house to a charity shop if she failed to master a difficult piano piece. She even rejected a homemade birthday card from her daughter Sophia because she had drawn it in a hurry.

But that highlights another difference, says Chua, which is directness and honesty. A *tiger mother* will not hesitate to tell their child that they are lazy, whereas western parents are always telling their children not to worry, that they will do better next time, even if they think they have been lazy.

The constant nagging of the *tiger mother*, the banning of TV and computer games seems harsh, but perhaps it works. Chua's children have not rebelled, and they don't resent their strict upbringing. They regularly get the top grades at school and are proficient at violin and piano – stereotypical symbols of success, critics would say. By contrast, children with more freedom and more laid-back parents will often lack self-discipline and will fail to push themselves to achieve more.

