



Employee NEWSLETTER

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Raising Resilient Children

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Emotions are inherent in the human experience and play a significant role in children's lives. Feelings can accentuate the positive with joy and excitement —or emphasize the negative with sadness and pain.

Studies show that emotional resilience is a critical component of success, helping children navigate life's inevitable ups and downs—leaning into happy experiences and soothing painful ones. It is a potential superpower.

Parents can help their children develop resilience by modeling emotional awareness, acceptance, and adaptiveness.

Start With Parents

The process starts with parents' prioritizing their own emotional lives. When they acknowledge their feelings with understanding and kindness, they model compassion.

The best way to teach children is to lead by example. When parents work through feelings, such as anxiety or sadness by taking a walk, talking to a friend, or listening to music, they teach children about self-respect and resilience. When they offer similar support to their children, they also help them manage their emotions.

This emotional journey calls for endurance and a bit of bravery. Resilience is a psychological superpower that we all aspire to, which is the ability to face adversity and recover to thrive. Let's explore how to foster this emotional gift in children.

Accepting And Validating All Emotions

Parents can start by accepting and validating the full spectrum of children's emotions. This support enables children to embrace their rich emotional world and navigate through its challenges.

When parents attend to children's emotions with compassion, children feel understood and valued. They are not alone and their experiences are normal. This parental affirmation boosts children's confidence, supports endurance, and lays the groundwork for empathy.

Helping children connect with their emotional lives includes all emotions, not just pleasant ones. While most people readily embrace children's positive or joyful feelings, they may unintentionally discourage negative ones like anger or sadness.

For instance, well-intentioned adults may say, "Don't be angry" or "There is nothing to be sad about," inadvertently shutting down the exploration of those feelings rather than addressing them. When this avoidance is repeated, it interferes with the understanding and mastery of difficult emotions, leading to emotional blind spots.

We all have feelings that we prefer to avoid. Our comfort level with emotions is personal, influenced partly by experience. Parents can ask themselves: What feelings do I embrace? What do I share with others? And which emotions do I try to suppress or hide?

Developing emotional resilience requires embracing all feelings. This acceptance is crucial in helping children navigate difficult emotions.

Helping Children Regulate and Co-Regulate

Children often need parents to help them to navigate intense emotions. They rely on adults' more mature nervous systems to find stability. This process is called

Continued on the next page.

"co-regulation," when one person soothes another. We all benefit from co-regulation at times, but children often require it to find their grounding.

When needed, parental soothing can be as simple as warm words of compassion, a gentle hug, or simply sitting calmly alongside an upset child, depending on the child's needs and preferences. This process of co-soothing is the training ground for self-soothing. By going through the cycle of feeling upset, receiving soothing, and returning to calm, children learn that discomfort is temporary and they can persevere.

Co-regulation does not mean parents should always rush in to "fix" children's discomfort, particularly if they don't want help. Children also need space to work through struggles on their own to build emotional competence. At these times, parents can regulate themselves and allow space for children's capacity to self-soothe. This process nurtures resilience and confidence and helps them set personal boundaries.

Building an Emotional Toolkit

Children aren't born knowing how to manage and express difficult feelings, such as anger or hurt. They need to learn about various emotions and what behaviors are acceptable. Can they hit someone when feeling angry, yell when feeling ignored, or cry if feeling hurt?

Once again, children learn by observing adults. When parents openly express their emotions, regardless of whether they are appropriately expressed, children watch, listen, and learn. So, parents should establish healthy emotional habits to serve as a guide for children. Parents can best teach children emotional awareness and regulation by practicing these skills themselves.

Children also need to develop their own emotional skills to manage various feelings and situations. Coping skills such as breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, checking in with oneself, or reframing negative thoughts can be helpful regulation tools for children.

Finding preferred coping skills is a personal process. Some children may seek comfort in hugs, while others prefer physical space. Some may find gentle music soothing, while others find it irritating. Parents can assist children in finding emotional resources based on their temperament and individual needs.

Building an emotional toolkit is an ongoing process that lasts a lifetime. As children's needs and capacities

change, updating and adapting coping skills is essential. Many excellent resources and books are available to support children in understanding and managing feelings (*Center of Excellence; Sesame Workshop; and Heart for All*).

Emotional Practice: Imperfection Required

There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach or "right" way to manage emotions. And there is no "right" or perfect way for parents to navigate their emotions. Emotional intelligence is a lifelong journey, and parents will not always get it right. Children don't need perfect parents, they need genuine role models who actively work on their own emotional challenges.

The ultimate goal is to help children understand and adapt to their inner emotional world, and enrich their lives. After all, emotions are also a source of joy, comfort, and insight. Even painful feelings potentially offer information about one's limitations or needs. Children learn about themselves by managing all of their emotions and developing confidence in their ability to deal with adversity.

As children learn to accept their emotions and find solutions, they also learn to attend to and trust themselves. Parents can provide a safe and nurturing space for children to practice managing these messy yet meaningful emotions. That is our human experience.

References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/relationship-based-parenting/202307/raising-resilient-children>