

INSIGHTS

Modelling self-kindness



This has been a tough parenting year. On a personal level it's been challenging, but when you add the extra difficulty of helping children and young people navigate this year, you'd be forgiven for feeling like you've had enough.

It's timely to look at US-based academic Dr. Brene' Brown's research that informed her book *The Gift of Imperfect Parenting*. Brown's core finding was that the best parenting strategies rely on modelling for them to be adopted by children. That's a little scary as it means we need to be the adults that we want to our kids to become.

There is great power in kids watching us practise how we manage hardships, frustrations and difficulties. Whether we use self-kindness or self-put downs, either will leave an impression on our kids. Not only do they see how we react when we stumble or make mistakes, but we give them permission to act in the same ways.

It's hard to be self-kind

If you're a goal-oriented type of person, highly-judgemental or someone who likes to get things done, then self-kindness can be difficult to befriend. It goes against the grain to laugh at your mistakes or miss a deadline, even though it won't be the end of the world as you know it. If you recognise this type of rigid approach then it may be time let go of some old ways. Inflexibility is the enemy of healthy wellbeing, which thrives on adaptability and self-forgiveness.

Let them hear the process

Giving a child or young person insight into your thinking is a powerful parenting strategy. Sharing your struggles and mess ups with kids in age-appropriate ways takes vulnerability and promotes empathy. It takes courage to share a comment such as, "I keep putting myself down, which is not helpful. I've got to talk to myself as if I'm talking to someone I love." Disclosing this type of self-talk is only useful if it's done in a safe, matter of fact way and a child is comfortable with the message.

Self-kindness means acting compassionately toward yourself when you are struggling to meet your own expectations, meeting with unexpected difficulties and/or met with failure. It's time to drop the stiff upper lip, put aside the strict schedule and stop berating yourself. Instead say to yourself, "This is really tough right now. How can I take some comfort and look after myself?" This is a message worth modelling particularly, if you are living with a perfectionist or a child with tendencies toward anxiety.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.