

Roots of resilience; empowering future problem solvers

The buzz word at the moment is resilience. We all wish to raise happy and resilient children and grandchildren. But what is resilience? By definition, resilience is the capacity to rise above difficult circumstances, allowing our children to exist in this less-than-perfect world, while moving forward with optimism and confidence. Our role is to guide them to identify their strengths and their capacities to not only cope but flourish.

The younger generation of today have been privileged to mostly live their lives with relative stability and good fortune. Recently the Corona virus has possibly been the most tangible test of resilience for many of our children and young people. Very often when dealing with our children's fears we do it at a distance. While we sympathise as adults having lived through them, we know they will move through this phase relatively unscathed. However, the uncertainty and the upheavals of the past few months in dealing with state-wide isolation has added complexity to the question of resilience. Being physically separated from our loved ones has made it more challenging to lend support and we have had to find new ways to connect and reassure one another. Also we have found ourselves in the uncomfortable situation of not only supporting our children's potential fears and discomfort but we have done so whilst sharing in their fears without the certainty that everything will be all right at the other end. On reflection, perhaps this time has shown us as individuals, as families and as a community to be more resilient than we ever realised.

It is one issue to be throughout into a situation where your resilience is tested but as families, we play a vital role in proactively building resilience in young people. How can we, in our everyday interactions with our young family members actively seek to build their resilience? The term helicopter parent or lawn mower parent is well known in describing parents (or grandparents) that hover and do not allow their children to experience uncomfortable feelings. In doing so, they perhaps unintentionally smother their children's emotional equity. They protect their children from distress and ensure that the road ahead is always smooth. But does this help our children? Will this ensure they lead a life of fulfillment, happiness and contentment? The answer is no.

To help our kids build resilience it is essential that they learn to sit with uncomfortable emotions and feelings. Always consoling your child or grandchild when they are upset, angry or experience a setback may result in stunting their capacity to problem solve and employ self-help strategies. As parents and grandparents, we all wish to ensure the best coping strategies to move forward in the world. In that case we need to allow them to experience the real world with our support while they are still young. We cannot shelter them forever (as much as you may want to). To really give our children and grandchildren the ability to feel inner strength, to feel inner peace, they too need to learn that their capacity to strategise through challenge allows them to experience feelings of achievement and success. Setbacks are impetus for improvement.

We can never underestimate the importance of modelling and talking about feelings to our children and grandchildren. We need to stop focusing on engendering

emotions. We must let all young people know that expressing their feelings is not a sign of weakness but rather of strength, courage and growth. Of the 27 feelings in the world almost half of these are negative. It is simply impossible to ignore them and if we do, it increases the chances of a negative impact on our children's wellbeing. This parenting and grandparenting gig is so much easier once our kids can identify and express their feelings in a calm and productive manner. It is important be able to acknowledge their emotional discomfort and not feel like you have all the answers. If they learn how to manage these hard feelings, they will feel empowered.

Dr. Albert Ellis, in his ground-breaking work on resilience explains that the ability to cope with adversity is all dependent on what we think when we are met with challenges. Resilient people respond to challenges with a "can do" attitude because they "think" of themselves as capable. They will then "feel" good about their abilities to cope with their problems and they see this as a place for growth. Identifying our thoughts, both positive and negative helps us to feel in control and have mastery over behaviours. It is sometimes hard to find the balance of allowing the negative feelings but also instilling in our children a sense of positivity and hope. During isolation it was not only enough to validate the challenges we all faced, but we also needed to model to our children and grandchildren our positive attitude and a belief that things will improve and get better. The power of our positivity must never be understated.

The simplicity of Gandhi's words resonates deeply. Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behaviour. Keep your behaviour positive because your behaviour becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny.

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