

Solutions

FAMILY SERVICES  EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NEWSLETTER

Issue 29

Resiliency

PREPARING YOUR CHILDREN FOR THEIR FUTURE AS ADULTS

The quality of our adult life depends in large measure on what we have developed as a result of life's experiences. Our method of reacting to stress and adapting in a positive manner to change, whether at work or in our private lives, is dependent on the tools acquired during our childhood. In this regard, it is said of someone who has a strong ability to adapt to stress-driven situations and change, that he has learned how to cope or is resilient.

While we all have a lifetime to develop varying aspects of ourselves, it is the childhood period that is the most important in acquiring many tools. As parents, we therefore have an important part to play in how our children learn to cope. Our attitude can make all the difference.

Avoiding physical and psychological overprotection

Be it physical or psychological, the overprotection of a child decreases his chances of developing his own ways to deal with his experiences. In the same way that the body's immune system must be exposed to the environment to be strengthened, the cognitive system needs to be grounded in reality in order to develop the ability to manage stress and the capability to adapt to change.

As a parent, our impulse is to want to protect our children from any harm that may befall them. This is normal and healthy. Nonetheless, a distinction must be made between protection and overprotection. Protection means to keep our children out of real danger. Overprotection is trying to keep our children distanced from all difficulties that may arise.

Overprotection often results from our own fears and our own adult needs. It is thus important to question oneself on the attitude that one adopts vis-à-vis our children.

For example:

- Your child has a setback in school. You react immediately by calling his teacher for an explanation. Is this protection or overprotection? Would it not be better to first sit down with your child and get his version of the facts?
- Rather than explaining to him a family conflict of which he is already knowledgeable, you cover up the situation in front of him. Are you protecting him or to the contrary, are you depriving him of an opportunity to express his fears and his needs?

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Resiliency (*continued*)

What will he learn from these situations if he is not involved?

It is important to psychologically support a child in his daily life, but it is also as important to avoid eliminating all difficulties that might arise as he grows up.

Guiding without smothering

In a troublesome time for your child, it is vital to let him feel that you are there for him and to be a good listener when he speaks about what is bothering him. However it is good to encourage him to find his own answers. You can certainly be involved in the discussion of solutions that he contemplates, but he must feel that he is able to exercise personal power in the given circumstances. It is also important to reinforce the decisions he takes by reviewing with him both the positive and negative consequences of the action that he has taken or proposes to take.

If he seems to believe that he is powerless over the situation, do not allow him to sink into the position of victim. Listen to his troubles vis-à-vis the situation and figure out with him how he can make it more acceptable. Do not impose on him what you see as an answer, but let him think about his own solutions. Remind him of another problem that he succeeded in overcoming and review what he determined was the solution.

Do not encourage avoiding trouble

Refusing to face a difficult situation will not make it disappear. Even if the context may change with time, and the situation evolves, the personal discomfort that existed may linger for a long time. Therefore do not encourage avoidance. For

example, if your child decides he no longer wants to attend swimming lessons, ask him why. You might discover that he has a conflict with a buddy or he has been unable to do a certain stroke, etc. If he had a long-time interest in swimming, it would be surprising that he should lose it suddenly. Often, it would be an underlying problem that would lead him to give it up. And even if he picks karate in exchange for swimming, he will always believe that he was not capable of facing a difficulty that arose.

Question yourself but do not feel guilty

As parents, it is understood that our attitude is largely dependent on what we ourselves have developed as tools. Even if one rationally knows what to do, in every day reality, there are still numerous factors that govern our actions and reactions. To feel guilty and to strive for perfection only adds to daily worries and helps no one. To question oneself from time to time as to our outlook and to recognize our strengths and personal limitations are the only objectives that you personally have and which, at the same time, will provide the best examples for your children.

France Boucher, Psychologist

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:

1-800-668-9920