

Most Importantly-Teach Resilience

What is happening to our teens?

In the 21st century, we mistakenly seek perfection and quick fixes to fit every child snugly into an idolized mold. **In fact, the desire to have our children lead a “perfect” life free from stress or pain of any kind is so great that parents often script their child’s every move.** Then when the child cannot conform to this perfected ideal, we see them as broken or in need of fixing and often unknowingly label them weak and incapable. Regretfully, our unmet expectation leads to shaming or at the very least a breach in relationship. **Before long the child not only views himself as broken, but actually is- having no tools to adequately handle disappointment or crisis.**

In truth, chronic disappointment can be very dangerous if left unattended. A teen who is not invited to “the party,” feels left out of the group, makes a low ACT score, or cannot please his parents or himself, often struggles under the weight of the resulting stress. Sadly, self-soothing responses such as turning to a deep dating relationship, drinking, smoking, or even drugs or sexual misconduct can quickly take the place of the adaptability one would normally predict. **However, resilience is not an instinctive trait.**

Resilience- the ability to endure hardship

Since we cannot control many of our life experiences, we must teach our children resilience-how to properly respond to hardship positively and with strength. **Resilience is being able to “bounce back” from difficult times, setbacks, failures, and challenges. It includes being able to deal with pressure that comes with stress and getting through tough times with a good outcome.** When faced with a problem, resilient people focus on finding a solution rather than feeling completely overwhelmed, getting depressed, or feeling like victims. Yet, resilience isn't about toughing it out, being stoic or going it alone. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key component of being resilient. Our children need Christ & our guidance in how to deal with obstacles, delays, setbacks, and the disapproval of others.

There are many ways to help our teens (and children) increase resilience

Experts have a lot to say about what builds resilience. **One fundamental element they all agree on is the importance of having access to a compassionate adult.** All resilient people have had someone in their lives pay attention, someone to turn to when in need. To get started, parents must become a coach - rather than remain a lecturer- someone who is deeply invested, will take the time to teach individual skills, and yet keep the bigger goal of resilience in mind. It will take listening to your teen’s heart, reflecting his emotions, and validating his efforts in order to help him develop his strengths and learn from his mistakes. As a coach, parents must go to where the child is and coach him forward.

Problem Solving is a major component of resilience

The ability to problem solve is essential. In fact, according to James Lehman, MSW, the latest research shows that 80% of all teen suicide attempts are from lack of problem solving skills rather than from depression or mental illness, as once assumed. **Yet, even when we know learning to problem solve is important, it is not always easy to let our teens work through the steps without taking over.**

When our teens struggle, we best let them know we are willing to help by giving them the right tools to solve the problem. Along with instruction in how to weigh the options and come to a workable solution, try introducing a series of simple questions -such as, “What do you want to accomplish?”, “How will we know if it is working?”, and “How will we know if it is not working?” This will give them a framework to also think through the end result of their decisions. Once their decision is made, fully support them by talking through steps to carry it out. If the solution doesn’t turn out to be successful, rather than shaming, stay in the coaching mode by saying “OK, that didn’t work. We need another plan,” and help them start the problem solving process all over again. **Thankfully, as our teens practice thinking through various possibilities and are allowed to carry them out, they will gradually gain confidence in making decisions even in the most challenging of circumstances.** Resiliency will become a way of life!

Unlocking the mystery of your child’s RESILIENCE could be a piece to your Parenting Puzzle!

To learn about parent coaching or for more training on this topic,
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