Help your child rise to the challenge

Whether it is going to school for the first time, making new friends or even going to school camp, children often experience difficulties that they need to overcome.

When children overcome problems and deal with unpleasant situations they learn they are capable, which is the basis of self-esteem. When parents protect children from difficulties or solve their problems they rob children of opportunities to learn about themselves. They also place their children at risk, as they need to deal with some of life’s smaller curve balls. The trick is to prepare them to have a line ready to help them draw on as adolescents and adults.

Resilient kids look back and draw on the skills and understandings they have developed in the past to help them deal with present challenges. For instance, a sixteen year old recently revealed how her time spent on a challenging twelve-day adventure school camp helped her overcome the homesickness she experienced on a six-month student exchange. She remembered that on the first day of her school camp she didn’t think she could make it – but she did. She experienced those same doubts early in her exchange but she knew that just as she had coped with her camp she would do so again, but this time in more difficult circumstances. She was drawing on the same resources.

The attitude and approach of parents and teachers will determine how successfully children and young people meet and overcome many of the obstacles and hurdles they meet.

Vitamins for parents

1. Frame the difficulty as a challenge rather than a problem. Even use the term challenge when speaking about the issue. “Going to school camp can be a challenge but I think you have what it takes to get through it.” Kids take their cues about how they view the world and events primarily from parents so if you see problems everywhere then it would take an innately optimistic child to see them otherwise. Your attitude is catching!

2. Help children develop the skills and mechanisms to cope with their difficulties. Talk them through challenging situations and give them ideas to help them cope. You may even rehearse some skills or the language that they may need in certain circumstances.

3. Show confidence in children’s abilities to overcome difficulties that they meet. If you think that a child can’t do something then you are probably correct. Children generally meet their parents’ expectations whether they are positive or negative.

4. Give children the opportunity to deal with the problem in their own way.

Quick Parenting Quiz

1. “Tweenagers” is the term usually attributed to which age group:
   a) 6 to 8 year olds?
   b) 8 to 12 year olds?
   c) 10 to 14 year olds?
   Answers: 1b) 2 True. As a group second borns tend to be gregarious and have more within their friendship groups than eldest children.

2. Second born children generally have more friends than first borns. True or false.
   Answers: 1b) 2 True. As a group second borns tend to be gregarious and have more within their friendship groups than eldest children.

Bright idea

Give them a line or two of resistance

Resisting peer pressure is a challenge for many children and young people. They often want to say No to a peer’s requests but they are unsure how to do so. Sometimes it is helpful to give children and young people some lines to help them resist a peer’s persistent request.

One technique that children can use when they are pressured to behave in unsafe ways is to gain some thinking time. A comeback line such as, “No, not now. I’ll think about it later.” helps them buy some time and still maintain some credibility. The trick it seems is that they need to have a line prepared that they can call on when needed.

Wise & Witty Words

“I can live two months on one good compliment”
Mark Twain

“If you talk to your children, you can help them to keep their lives together. If you talk to them skillfully, you can help them to build future dreams.”
Rudolf Dreikurs