

Raising mentally and emotionally tough kids

By Dr. Gregory Ramey

Tough people don't get upset easily. They are resilient in the face of adversity. They are great problem solvers, focusing on ways to deal with problems rather than complaining about things they can't control.

These types of people don't deny their emotions, but they don't allow themselves to be victimised by their feelings. They get angry, depressed and anxious like the rest of us. However, their mental guidepost is a motto used by the Navy SEALs. They are comfortable being uncomfortable.

They view unpleasant feelings or bad events as messages to be understood and acted upon. Their behaviours are deliberate, with an emphasis on what they can do differently rather than on what others should be doing.

Many kids that I see in my office complain about stressful events that are not problems to mentally and emotionally tough kids. The level of stress hasn't increased with our kids over the years. Rather, more kids seem emotionally weak and unprepared to deal with life's challenges.

Here's how you can raise tough kids.

1. Develop a tough mental mindset.

This toughness starts with the way we think about ourselves and the world. Bad things happen to us every day. One young lady recently told me that when annoying events happen, "I just build a bridge and get over it!"

Help manage the expectations of your kids, beginning at an early age. Emphasise that they will not always be entertained, happy and comfortable. When bad things happen, don't be so quick to rush in and make everything better. Teach your child to tolerate unpleasant situations.

As with many things in parenting, this all starts with us. Kids learn from their parents about how to deal with tough situations. I find it helpful in some situations to actually articulate my thoughts around kids, so they can appreciate the way I'm approaching some problem.

2. Stop being so sympathetic.

When your child fails or is frustrated, it's fine to offer support and understanding. However, keep this in moderation. Your exaggerated compassion is harmful to your child. The quality of our lives is determined not by avoiding problems but by our responses to them. Help your child move from pity to problem solving.

3. Be grateful.

Toward the end of a particularly tough day, I received a very nice email from a friend at work. Do I reflect upon the positive email or the distressing events of the day? It's my choice. Help your children learn to be grateful for life's everyday treasures rather than focus on negative experiences.

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