

10 Tips to Raising a Resilient Child

1. Don't accommodate every need.

Whenever we try to provide certainty and comfort, we are getting in the way of children being able to develop their own problem-solving and mastery. (Overprotecting kids only fuels their anxiety.)

Example: A child gets out of school at 3:15. But they worry about their parent picking them up on time. So the parent arrives an hour earlier and parks by their child's classroom so they can see the parent is there.

2. Avoid eliminating all risk.

The key is to allow appropriate risks and teach your kids essential skills. Start young. The child who's going to get his driver's license is going to have started when he's 5 [years old] learning how to ride his bike and look both ways [slow down and pay attention]. Giving kids age-appropriate freedom helps them learn their own limits, she said.

3. Teach them to problem-solve.

Let's say your child wants to go to sleep-away camp, but they're nervous about being away from home. An anxious parent, might say, "Well, then there's no reason for you to go."

But a better approach is to normalize your child's nervousness, and help them figure out how to navigate being homesick. So you might ask your child how they can practice getting used to being away from home.

4. Teach your kids concrete skills.

Focuses on the specific skills children need to learn in order to handle certain situations. Maybe think, where are we going with this [situation]? What skill do they need to get there?

5. Avoid "why" questions.

Why questions aren't helpful in promoting problem-solving. If your child left their bike in the rain, and you ask "why?" what will they say? I was careless. I'm an 8-year-old.

"How" questions teach children different skills. "How do you get yourself out of bed when it's warm and cozy? How do you handle the noisy boys on the bus that bug you?"

5. Don't provide all the answers.

Rather than providing your kids with every answer, start using the phrase "I don't know," followed by promoting problem-solving." Using this phrase helps kids learn to tolerate uncertainty and think about ways to deal with potential challenges. Also, starting with small situations when they're young helps prepare kids to handle bigger trials. They won't like it, but they'll get used to it.

For instance, if your child asks if they're getting a shot at the doctor's office, instead of placating them, say, "I don't know. You might be due for a shot. Let's figure out how you're doing to get through it."

7. Avoid talking in catastrophic terms.

Pay attention to what you say to your kids and around them. Anxious parents, in particular, tend to talk very catastrophically around their children. For instance, instead of saying "It's really important for you to learn how to swim," they say, "It's really important for you to learn how to swim because it'd be devastating to me if you drowned."

8. Let your kids make mistakes.

Failure is not the end of the world. [It's the] place you get to when you figure out what to do next. Letting kids mess up is tough and painful for parents. But it helps kids learn how to fix slip-ups and make better decisions next time.

9. Help them manage their emotions.

Emotional management is key in resilience. Teach your kids that all emotions are OK. It's OK to feel angry that you lost the game or someone else finished your ice cream. Also, teach them that after feeling their feelings, they need to think through what they're doing next.

Kids learn very quickly which powerful emotions get them what they want. Parents have to learn how to ride the emotions, too. You might tell your child, "I understand that you feel that way. I'd feel the same way if I were in your shoes, but now you have to figure out what the appropriate next step is."

10. Model resiliency.

Of course, kids also learn from observing their parents' behavior. Try to be calm and consistent. You cannot say to a child you want them to control their emotions, while you yourself are flipping out."

Parenting takes a lot of practice and we all screw up. When you do make a mistake, admit it. "I really screwed up. I'm sorry I handled that poorly. Let's talk about a different way to handle that in the future.

Resiliency helps kids navigate the inevitable trials, triumphs and tribulations of childhood and adolescence. Resilient kids also become resilient adults, able to survive and thrive in the face of life's unavoidable stressors.