



Becoming robust in a fragile world



How often do we hear the phrase ‘they’re wrapped up in cotton wool?’ Worryingly, I don’t feel that cotton wool best describes the metaphoric material that some children today are wrapped up in. As a friend recently said, ‘there’ll be a national shortage of bubble wrap soon if we carry on protecting children in the way we are.’ More and more I see examples of children being protected from any sort of ‘negative’ emotion and not being taught to stand up, shake themselves down and get on with life’s experiences.

It is becoming more and more apparent that the lines between parent and child roles are becoming blurred and confused. There are increasing numbers of cases in which a parent is seeking a friendship with their child rather than being there to help the child become robust by providing security, guidance and discipline.

I could give countless examples of where I’ve encouraged a parent to follow through on a basic action with their child and have been met with the simple reply of ‘but my child doesn’t want to, what can I do about it?’. More and more I am having to remind parents that they are the parent and the one who should have the ultimate authority. The children I teach wouldn’t ever question or argue something I asked them to do. Not because I’m a figure to be feared but because they know and trust that I mean what I say and that’s the end of it.

It is important for children to experience situations that are uncomfortable, to do things that they don’t want to do and to know that life isn’t an ideal within which they can hide. What good would we be doing by creating a world for our children in which they experience no pain, are protected from tough talks and never experience what it is to lose? That simply isn’t life. Rather than protecting children from any kind of discomfort, the key is teaching them how to handle what they think and feel as a result of that discomfort. By doing this they will ultimately be strengthened.

A practical example of this would be when a child falls over on the playground and clearly hasn’t seriously hurt themselves. We can either make a huge fuss over the child and send for the first aid kit which in turn makes the fall seem even more dramatic in the eyes of the child, or we can pick them up, dust them down and reassure them that they are ok before sending them on their way. It is the way that we as adults handle a painful situation with a child that will teach the child to become more robust and will as a result enable them to feel more secure.

Life isn’t easy, it isn’t always fair, it will most certainly come with its fair share of knocks along the way and so learning to stand tall and handle the wave of emotion is essential in learning to handle ourselves and life. It’s far wiser to teach children to handle life’s knocks and disappointments at a young age rather than having to try and handle these for the first time as an adult. It’s like the stacking cups that toddlers take great enjoyment in building up and knocking down; if we weren’t taught to be robust at a young age it’s like the cups being arranged with the smallest at the bottom. As the years go by the responsibilities and pressures of life increase and we end up stacking bigger cups on top of a fragile foundation that simply isn’t equipped to handle what’s being sent its way. The outcome is inevitable but more importantly, avoidable.

Wrapping children in bubble wrap and protecting them from any kind of harm will ultimately do them more harm in the long term. Is that a price really worth paying?

Jen