

12 Things Parents of Mentally Strong Children Don't Do

My five-year-old was a blubbering, hot mess. He tackled kindergarten fine nine months before, but the first day of summer camp was too much for him.

"I don't want to go. I don't want to go," he moaned, sobbing fat crocodile tears.

Most parents have been in situations like this. It's one of the toughest jobs of being a parent, helping kids through situations like this. But nudging them through is important.

Resiliency – in both children and adults – is achieved by confronting and pushing through the challenges our brain and body want to shrink from. Maybe it's getting on the school bus. Maybe, for adults, it's applying for one more job after being rejected a dozen times that month. Maybe it's facing a scary test result or a bully.

Whatever the challenge is, the important thing is recognizing you can face it. And the truth is you probably can. Both history and [research](#) offer evidence of a near-infinite human capacity to endure hardship and confront obstacles, even terrifying ones.

"The human capacity for burden is like bamboo," author Jodi Picoult wrote in her bestselling novel [My Sister's Keeper](#), "far more flexible than you'd ever believe at first glance."

Raising Resilient Children

However, numerous cultural trends suggest we're forgetting this crucial lesson, at least as it applies to raising our kids. There's [helicopter parenting](#), which shows that many parents struggle to get out of the way and just let kids play.

There's also [the self-esteem movement](#), which erupted in the 1980s and seeks to shelter kids from criticism, failure, and the adverse consequences of their actions. In many schools, it's now [verboten](#) to have best friends lest someone's feelings get hurt. And we've all heard of [Everyone Gets a Trophy](#).

As a father of three little kids, I understand the instinct to want to shield children from the harsh realities of life. It's not easy telling your little girl to wipe away the tears and get back on. But it is important to do so.

[Amy Morin](#) knows a few things about hardship. She was widowed at just 26 years of age. Despite the tragedy she suffered, Morin went on to become a psychotherapist, columnist, and author. She says a key to raising resilient children is avoiding the many unhealthy parenting practices that have grown common in our society.

These practices, she says, rob children of mental strength. Resilience is like a muscle. It needs to be worked if it's going to get stronger.

"Mental strength is what helps kids bounce back from setbacks and it gives them the strength to keep going, even when they're plagued with self-doubt," writes Morin, who also teaches psychology at Northeastern University in Boston. "A strong mental muscle is the key to helping kids reach their greatest potential in life."

[Writing at Inc.](#), Morin enumerated a long list of things parents of mentally strong children *don't do*. Here are 12 of them. (Note: Descriptions have been abridged.)

1. Condoning a Victim Mentality

Rejection, failure, and unfairness are a part of life. Refuse to attend your kids' pity parties. Teach them that no matter how tough or unjust their circumstances, they can always take

positive action.

2. Parenting Out of Guilt

Show your kids that even though you feel guilty sometimes – and all good parents do – you’re not going to allow your uncomfortable emotions to get in the way of making wise decisions.

3. Making Their Kids the Center of the Universe

If you make your entire life revolve around your kids, they’ll grow up thinking everyone should cater to them. And self-absorbed, entitled adults aren’t likely to get very far in life.

4. Allowing Fear to Dictate Their Choices

Although keeping your kids inside a protective bubble will spare you a lot of anxiety, playing it too safe teaches your child that fear must be avoided at all times. Show your kids that the best way to conquer fear is to face those fears head-on.

5. Giving Their Kids Power over Them

Letting kids dictate what the family is going to eat for dinner or where the family is going on vacation gives kids more power than they are developmentally ready to handle. Treating kids like an equal – or the boss – actually robs them of mental strength.

6. Expecting Perfection

Expecting your kids to perform well is healthy. But expecting them to be perfect will backfire. Teach your kids that it's OK to fail and it's OK not to be great at everything they do.

7. Letting Their Kids Avoid Responsibility

Kids who perform age-appropriate duties aren't overburdened. Instead, they're gaining the mental strength they need to become responsible citizens.

8. Shielding Their Kids from Pain

Hurt feelings, sadness, and anxiety are part of life. And letting kids experience those painful feelings gives them opportunities to practice tolerating discomfort.

9. Feeling Responsible for Their Kids' Emotions

Cheering your kids up when they're sad and calming them down when they're upset means you take responsibility for regulating their emotions. Kids need to gain emotional competence so they can learn to manage their own feelings.

10. Preventing Their Kids from Making Mistakes

Correcting your kids' math homework, double-checking to make sure they've packed their lunch, and constantly reminding them to do their chores won't do them any favors. Natural consequences can be some of life's greatest teachers.

11. Confusing Discipline with Punishment

Punishment involves making kids suffer for their wrongdoing. Discipline, however, is about teaching them how to do better

in the future.

Raising a child who fears 'getting in trouble' isn't the same as raising a child who wants to make good choices.

12. Taking Shortcuts to Avoid Discomfort

Although giving in to a whining child or doing your kids' chores for them will make your life a little easier right now, those shortcuts instill unhealthy habits in your kids.

The list is helpful and full of wisdom, but I also have to admit that it was somewhat convicting for me. Many things listed here are things I do with some regularity (#3, #5, and #9, if you really want to know).

Alas, parents are no more perfect than children. But the larger point is that parents should heed Morin's advice, at least if they're interested in raising children who will grow into self-sufficient, responsible young adults.

Parents would be wise to recognize that keeping their children from experiencing conflict, challenges, and failure might make themselves feel better.

Life is a journey. We all will experience failure and pain, shame and loss. We will all face challenges at one time or another that will feel insurmountable. It's how we choose to face these challenges that will determine who we are.

"The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks," Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his timeless work *Self-Reliance*. "Character teaches above our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions,

and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment.”

Keeping children from experiencing conflict, challenges, and failure might make parents feel better, but it’s not doing their offspring any favors.

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