

Childhood isn't stress-free. Children take tests, learn new information, change schools, change neighbourhoods, get sick, get braces, encounter bullies, make new friends and occasionally get hurt by those friends.

What helps children in navigating these kinds of challenges is resilience. Resilient children are problem solvers. They face unfamiliar or tough situations and strive to find good solutions.

This doesn't mean that children have to do everything on their own. Rather, they know how to ask for help and are able to problem-solve their next steps.

Resilience isn't birthright. It can be taught. Sometimes we need to equip children with the skills to handle the unexpected, which actually contrasts our cultural approach.

We have become a culture of trying to make sure our children are comfortable. We try to stay one step ahead of everything our children are going to run into. Unfortunately, life doesn't work that way.

Anxious people have an especially hard time helping their children tolerate uncertainty, simply because they have a hard time tolerating it themselves. The idea of putting your child through the same pain that you went through is difficult. So anxious parents try to protect their children and shield them from worst-case scenarios.

However, a parent's job isn't to be there all the time for their children, it's to teach them to handle uncertainty and to problem-solve.

1. Don't accommodate their 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 children only fuels their anxiety.

2. Avoid eliminating all risk

Naturally, parents want to keep their children safe. But eliminating all risk robs children of learning resiliency. The key is to allow appropriate risks and teach your children essential skills. When a child is learning how to ride their bike and look both ways, they learn to slow down and pay attention.

Giving children age-appropriate freedom helps them learn their own limits and develop good decision making skills.

3. Teach them to problem-solve

Engage your child in working out how they can handle challenges. Give them the opportunity, over and over, to consider and try out what works and what doesn't.

For example, a child wants to go to school camp, but they're nervous about sleeping away from home. An anxious parent might decide that there is no need for the child

to go. But a different approach is to normalize your child's nervousness (acknowledge that what they feel is genuine), but help them work out how to navigate being homesick, so that they can still join in with the experience of camp. This way, emotions are recognised and valued, but not allowed to prevent life experiences.

4. Teach your children concrete skills

Focus on the specific skills they'll need to learn in order to handle certain situations. For instance, teach a shy child how to greet someone and start a conversation by using role-play.

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."

Ask "how" questions instead. "You left your bike out in the rain, and your chain rusted. How will you fix that?" For instance, they might go online to see how to fix the chain or contribute money to a new chain.

6. Don't provide all the answers

Rather than providing your children with every answer, start using the phrase "I don't know," or "That's an interesting question," ... followed by promoting problem-solving. Using this phrase helps children learn to tolerate uncertainty and think about ways to deal with potential challenges.

Starting with small situations when they're young helps prepare children to handle bigger trials as they grow older. They might not like it, but they'll get used to it.

For instance, if your child asks if they need an injection at the doctor's, instead of placating them, say, "I don't know. You might be due for one. Let's work out what might happen and how you're doing to get through it."

Similarly, if your child says, "I think I might be sick today," instead of saying, "No, you won't," respond with, "You might, so how might you handle that?"

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 negatively around their children, describing the worst case scenario. 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."

Similarly, when friends fall out, think carefully about how you describe and discuss this with your child. There is a distinction between thoughtless behaviour, rude

behaviour, mean behaviour and bullying behaviour. Teach them to acknowledge how they might be able to take responsibility to solve the problem.

8. Let your children make mistakes

Failure is not the end of the world. Letting children mess up is tough and painful for parents. But it helps children learn how to fix slip-ups and make better decisions next time. Similarly, it's ok to struggle intelligently. Don't be tempted to jump in too quickly with a solution.

Sometimes, if a child has homework or an assignment, anxious or overprotective parents typically want to make sure that it is perfect, even if their child has no interest in doing it in the first place. Let your kids see the consequences of their actions if they don't put in the effort. If your child doesn't want to go to football practice, let them stay at home. Next time they'll sit on the bench and probably feel uncomfortable.

9. Help them manage their emotions

Emotional management is key in the development of resilience. Teach your children that all emotions are OK and a wide range of emotions are both acceptable and desirable. It's OK to feel angry that you lost the game or that someone called you a name. However, teach them that after feeling their feelings, they need to think through what they're doing next.

Children learn 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 work out what the appropriate next step is."

If your child throws a tantrum, be clear about what behaviour is appropriate (and inappropriate). You might say, "I'm sorry we're not going to get ice cream, but this behaviour is unacceptable."

10. Model resiliency

Children learn from observing their parents' behaviour. Try to be calm and consistent. You cannot say to a child you want them to control their emotions, while you yourself are losing control of your own.

Parenting takes a lot of practice. When you do make a mistake, admit it. "I made a mistake. I'm sorry I reacted that way. Let's talk about a different way to handle that in the future."

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