



The Fear of Disappointment

I recently watched a parent pick up his child from Extended Day and I noticed the child was upset. I asked the dad what was wrong? He said he just told his child that the plans they had that evening had to be cancelled. He explained to me that his son had really been looking forward to the activity for some time. His son was fighting back tears and pleading his case with his dad. The dad simply said that he was sorry, and that sometimes things do not work out, as planned, and other things are more important. What a lesson for his child, a tough one at a young age, but an important one at the same time. If this were not his first big disappointment, it would certainly not be his last.

As an onlooker, I felt for both. Both were obviously disappointed. As a parent, I empathized because it brought me back to similar scenarios with my own children when I agonized over seeing them face disappointment. As an educator, I applauded the dad's kind but firm approach with his son. He did not dwell, he did not make promises, he did not try to make up for the disappointment, he simply validated his child's feelings allowing him to process and work through the situation. The next time this child is faced with disappointment, he will have stronger coping skills.

As parents, we struggle with parenting decisions every day, especially when our children are young. After all, our job is to provide and protect. Quite often this leads us to believe that to protect we need to shield our children from hurt, sadness, disappointment, or "the real world" at all costs, and rescue them from certain feelings and experiences. Our own feelings take over here, and we forget the importance of allowing our children to learn to deal with these uncomfortable situations and develop necessary coping skills for facing bumps in the road.

If you have lived through the terrible twos and experienced toddler tantrums, you know that nothing is going to happen until your child works through that tantrum. No amount of cajoling, threatening, bribing, yelling, or pleading will make a difference. Only when the tantrum is over can any inroads be made. Often, by that time, the toddler is ready to move on, all prior frustration forgotten. Toddlers move through the toddler tantrum stage unscathed.

However, as they grow we must continue to provide the right opportunities to help our children work through frustrations and difficult feelings. We must not be afraid to disappoint. We need to have faith in their abilities to work through tough experiences, accept the unexpected outcome, and self-soothe in the face of hurt and disappointment. Validating their feelings and allowing them time to feel what they feel will allow these things to occur. They too will be unscathed. Our children's future is bright and hopeful and yes, the road may not be smooth, but what better gift can we give to our children than by raising them to be resilient individuals.

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