**They’ll Be Better Equipped to Handle Life’s Challenges**

What happens when your child’s friend suddenly rejects them? Or when your child gets angry when their sibling receives the larger slice of cake? According to psychotherapist and author, Amy Morin, it is perfectly natural for parents to want to jump in and “fix” the situation because no one wants to see their child upset. However, Morin recommends that resilience is one of the more important lessons for children to learn. Using her book,*13 Things Mentally Strong Parents Don’t Do*, Morin focused her research to help parents show their kids how to take responsibility over their emotions. Resilience, Confidence and Positivity are the essential tools all children should possess to be better equipped to handle life’s challenges.

Unfortunately, as society gets caught up in soccer practice and homework each day, many kids are not developing the mental strength they need to become responsible adults. It is best not to lose sight of the bigger picture when it comes to teaching kids life lessons to help them navigate their day-to-day journey in adulthood. Here are 3 things you can do to help your kids become the strongest and best versions of themselves.

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**Teach your kids to think realistically**

Adults struggle with a variety of negative thoughts daily: self-doubt, harsh criticism and catastrophic thinking. Many are surprised to learn that kids struggle with the same types of thoughts that adults have. Unfortunately, most parents do not teach their children how to deal with these negative thoughts, but instead are quick to say to them, “Quit worrying” or “It’ll turn out fine.

A better approach is to teach kids how to think realistically to address challenging situations and that begins with helping them to develop healthier self-talk. A child who initially thinks, “I’ll never be able to pass math class should instead adopt a growth mindset with the following inner dialogue, “I can improve my math grade by studying hard, asking for help, and doing my homework.”

**How to Teach This**

* Encourage your kid to become a “Thought Detective”: one who logically examines any evidence that supports and contradicts any assumptions they may have.
* If your kid says something negative, ask “What makes you think that’s true? And “What is some evidence that might not be true?”
* Teach your kid to challenge their negative thoughts and prove themselves wrong.

**Teach your kids to manage their emotions**

While many college freshmen believe they have academic preparedness for the college/university setting, there is unfortunately a significant lack of emotional preparedness as they grapple with loneliness, decision making, sadness and anxiety each week. Before they step foot on any campus of higher learning, children need to not only learn about their emotions but also how their emotions can influence them.

Many parents struggle to cope with their own emotions in their role. For instance, when their child is crying for that extra cookie, it is important for the parent not to give in to guilt and firmly say, “No”. Unfortunately, many parenting choices are made because guilt is a very uncomfortable feeling. But understanding this should empower parents to know that they can cope with this type of guilt because their decision is for the betterment of the child’s overall health and ultimately reinforces respect for the parental hierarchy within the household. The parents can feel guilty, but that doesn’t mean the decision to deny the cookie was a bad choice.

The same lesson should be taught to children, too,

It is crucial not to allow an unhealthy fear of the uncomfortable to dictate life’s choices. This will help kids to be resilient to peer pressure when their “friend” asks if they can cheat off their paper. A mentally strong child will be able to say, “No”. In this instance, the child may feel guilty when they say, “No” to their “friend, but they will understand that saying “No” was not a bad choice.

If at some point a child can say, “I’m feeling anxious and that anxiety makes me want to avoid scary things”, then they will be better equipped to face their fears. The child is demonstrating that they have a better understanding of how to cope with their emotions. Most importantly, they are developing an ability to handle emotional discomfort more confidently.

**How to Teach This**

* Teach your kids to recognize their feelings.
* Label your kid’s emotions so that they can understand how those emotions influence their decisions.
* Validate your kid’s emotions and teach them they have a choice in how they deal with their feelings.

**Teach your kids to take positive action**

Many parents have this tendency to rescue their kids from their struggles. Some are quick to even micromanage their kids’ daily activities. Unfortunately, as a result, kids do not learn how to make healthy choices on their own.

Mentally strong kids take positive action in order to face their fears. Positive action also means that kids know how to persevere when they are tired and act according to their own values- even when this act is not the “popular thing to do”.

**How to Teach This**

* Be a supportive but not an overprotective parent by allowing your kid to experience life and its challenges using the coping skills they have learned.
* Encourage your kid to take heathy risks and to step outside of their comfort zone for optimal growth and learning.
* Proactively teach your kids problem solving skills.
* Maintain an open line of communication to listen to your kid’s thoughts and feelings, fostering an environment where they feel safe to express themselves.



**Adapted from:** Morin, A. (2017, September 18). *How to raise mentally strong kids in today’s world*. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201709/how-to-raise-mentally-strong-kids-in-todays-world

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