



PARENT SENSE VICKI CURRAN, EDS, MA, LPC, NCC

Parenting from gut, not guilt

Raising kids equipped to handle real-world challenges means we must parent intentionally. “Rescuing” or “protecting” them from facing their fears or being accountable for their mistakes can actually prevent them from reaching their greatest potential.

In order for our children to be happy, empathetic, resilient and successful adults, there are some things we can do to help them:

1. Make parenting decisions from your gut, not your guilt.

Guilty feelings make us give in to our children, even if it's not in their best inter-

est. We've all heard, “But everyone else has...” or “But all my friends are allowed to...”. First, remember you don't have to respond right away. Take time to figure out what you're comfortable with and what fits with your family's value system. Sometimes a compromise is available; sometimes, “no” is still best.

2. Teach children to take responsibility for their actions.

Expecting children to own their actions helps them learn to be responsible citizens. Owning the consequences of their decisions teaches them to make better decisions in the future. Res-

cuing them — whether it's negotiating with a teacher or dropping off forgotten items — only enables them to continue making the same mistakes.

3. Allow children the opportunity to experience disappointment.

It's difficult to watch our kids struggle, but hardship helps them learn how to tolerate negative situations and become more resilient. By letting kids try and fail, parents support their children as they learn to cope with the pain. Even when we are the ones disappointing them, we are teaching them valuable skills. Rejection, failure, and

unfairness are part of life. Getting through this helps kids gain confidence in their ability to deal with whatever life throws their way. Maneuvering through smaller disappointments now helps them handle the bigger ones in the future.

4. Encourage children to be the best they can be... not better than everyone else.

High expectations are healthy but research has shown that the levels of childhood anxiety have skyrocketed. The reality is, our children are not going to excel at everything they do. Rather than push them to be better than everyone else, fo-

cus on striving to be the best versions of themselves. Teach them to take pride in the effort they put in, not just in the result. Hopefully, in comparing themselves to their previous accomplishments, children will measure their own growth and progress and stop competing with those around them.

5. Help children to learn how to regulate their own emotions.

As parents, it's normal to want to cheer kids up when they're sad or calm them down when they're angry. But, this prevents them from learning how to do it themselves. Validating their feelings is different than “fixing” those feelings. Understanding what they are going through doesn't mean we have to rescue them from the situation or distract them away from the unpleasantness they are experiencing. It

means we are there to listen, no matter what.

7. Maintain your personal values no matter what.

Choosing family values and discussing them frequently with children provides them with a “guideline”. As children grow, they may not always agree with those values, but they will always be aware of them when making decisions. Unlike math or reading, values are not taught with flash cards or workbooks. Instead, they are taught all day, every day, through modeling. Having solid family values gives kids a strong sense of what is right and wrong for them.

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-612-3148.