



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

Let's throw away the bubble wrap

With the recent alerts about abduction attempts in our area, it is understandable that we are hypervigilant about our children's safety and well-being. However, recently when my youngest son ended up in the ER for a CAT scan because of a fall, I started thinking about all the ways I "should have" prevented it. I went into "safety proof" mode and contemplated all the potential future hazards he might encounter and how to avoid them.

Eventually, I remembered falls are a part of growing up. When did parenting become about thinking accidents and failures are preventable instead of a natural part of life? In avoiding reasonable discomfort for our children, we actually inhibit their ability to become self-sufficient, independent, confident individuals.

As a result of "helicopter parenting" [hovering over our children to ensure there are no problems for them] and "lawnmower parenting" [clearing a path for our children to smooth out any rough patches or obstacles before they even see them coming], we are raising the "tea cup generation." These are children who have been gently and carefully handled. They are perfectly formed, projecting a beautifully finished product. However, they are extremely fragile and can crumble under the slightest bit of pressure.

It might seem safer for our kids to spend all their time in supervised, structured activities. It might feel better knowing they are constantly monitored by qualified, caring adults. But children also need to not be rescued from every possible fall. They need to learn how to handle minor altercations and understand how to set up the rules and structure to spontaneous pick-up games. If we're always watching our kids and advising them on what to do, they'll never learn to trust their own instincts or learn

how to negotiate without help.

Our efforts to shield our children from risks have actually created a false sense of security. Real life is inevitably filled with all kinds of financial, social, physical and emotional risks. In the same way we try to safety proof our playgrounds by replacing all the towering metal slides with molded plastic models that completely enclose our children, we have begun to encapsulate our children from feeling any negative experiences in life. But if we're constantly "safety proofing" their world, how will they learn to navigate it when they get older?

Instead, let's "world-proof" our children. Let's teach them how to recognize and handle difficult situations now, when they're young. Growing up is crossing the

road unsupervised, packing a snack for school; deciding whether to study for the math test tomorrow or go to the mall with friends; picking up the phone and placing the family pizza order; or getting a small job for spending money.

These are all skills our children will need as adults, why not let them practice those skills now? The pride our children gain from accomplishing these things will give them a sense of competence and independence. The "reward" will not come from us in the form of applause or praise; it will be the confidence they gain knowing they can eventually be autonomous and self-reliant.

So when our children achieve their goals, congratulate their efforts, not only on the outcome. When they fail, encourage what they did well

but allow them to contemplate what they need to do differently the next time. When they make poor decisions, allow them to experience the natural consequences. [Remember that choice between the math test and the mall?]

Let's consider throwing away the bubble wrap we want to cover our children in ... after all, if they're not tea cups, they won't need it!

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