

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Resilience: Bouncing Back from Life's Challenges

“If you call your troubles experiences and remember that every experience develops some latent force within you, you will grow vigorous and happy, however adverse your circumstances might be.” ~ John Heywood

NONE OF US WANTS to invite difficult experiences into our child's life, and a part of us would even protect them from having to deal with adversity. We would keep them from enduring harsh words from another child, the loss of a beloved pet, or even from a huge disappointment. As our children get older, we realize that we aren't in control of what happens to them, and that the best role we can play is to help them respond to the inevitable hardships of life with strength and endurance. That ability to bounce back and even learn from tough experiences is called resilience.

Sara Truebridge, the mother of one of our graduates, has just written an important book on the subject called *Resilience Begins with Beliefs: Building On Student Strengths for Success in School*. Sara is an educational consultant and researcher, and over the years she has offered valued help to our school. She has also been a role model for demonstrating the beliefs that promote resilience, and I wrote about one of her experiences in my book *The Best Things Parents Do*.

When Sara's son was a 10-year-old student at our school, he broke his leg. The doctor in the emergency room, where Ian was taken by ambulance, spoke very harshly to Sara and would not let her go in the room with her son during the painful procedure of resetting the bone. However, instead of reacting in anger, Sara's overall response to the shocking event was an awareness of the opportunity for learning about responding to difficulties that it provided for Ian and the whole family.

Sara says, “When I got to the hospital, I was hit with a huge realization. ‘My son will leave this hospital and get better, but many children here will never go home again.’ That instantly put my life in perspective, and I realized how lucky I was that nothing worse had happened.”

The challenges in the situation didn't end at the hospital. However, Sara's belief that Ian would glean positive attitudes from the experience is a key component of resilience. Ian felt frustrated watching other people play while he was restricted to a wheelchair. Yet, over time, he became aware that his hardship lasted only a few months while others never get the chance to walk. As a college sophomore, Ian still feels he benefitted from the accident.

Think how different Ian's perspective would have been if Sara had remained angry at the doctor or referred to his broken leg as unfair.

We all have the chance to help children believe that they can handle life's challenges, and Sara's book offers readers the tools to create resilient perspectives on a daily basis.

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