



FAMILY *Matters*

Michael D. Zito, Ph.D.



Life Lessons for Kids Through Good Parenting

Parenting is one of the most difficult jobs that comes with very little advanced training. Good parenting should include developing key life skills in children. In my 35 years of experience, I have noticed an increase in a parenting style that is highly accommodating to children, providing them too many choices that may give them unrealistic views of the world. As we think about parenting for life skills, it is important to think about what skills children need to exist independently from parents in society. Let's first consider some societal trends.

In the late 1960s, there was a strong movement to promote self-esteem in children. On the surface, this seemed like an excellent idea, but it has morphed in a negative direction. For example, to protect self-esteem, parents often avoid disappointing children and work very hard to meet their every need. This does not give children the opportunity to learn how to deal with disappointment, frustration and receive corrective feedback about what they're doing to help them improve. While children should be given some choices, being too accommodating can lead to a sense of entitlement. In my experience, this overly accom-

modating parenting style gives an unrealistic view of how they will be treated as adults. I am not suggesting that parents adopt a "tough love" approach to parenting. Rather, parenting does need to consider the needs of children, just not in a way that blocks their ability to develop key life skills.

Children need to learn how to tolerate frustration, deal with disappointment and realize the world does not always revolve around their needs only. A good example of this could be a parent who makes three different meals for dinner because three different children prefer different foods. Food allergies aside, parents should provide healthy meal options, but not be overly accommodating by producing multiple menus of food. To do so would give a message that your child should be catered to and to have their every need met. Children should also learn about the value of volunteering for needy causes, making charitable donations, being helpful to others all with the goal of doing their part to make the world a better place. In order to combat a sense of entitlement that many children have, children need to understand that privileges and special opportunities need to be earned.

What should parents do?

- Understand that other than basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter, privileges and special opportunities should be earned not granted.
 - Realize that it is okay to disappoint your children since doing so counteracts self-centeredness and entitlement.
 - Be compassionate and understanding yet don't over cater to their needs.
 - Use access to privileges (cell phone, gaming and internet access) as a reward for completing responsibilities (homework, household chores, and important family activities)
 - Develop a strong work ethic by promoting the importance of effort to achieve success in activities such as sports, performance or academics.
 - Develop healthy habits that include food intake and exercise habits via sport or other activities.
 - Promote the growth mindset in children by emphasizing that most experiences in life (good or bad) are learning opportunities that help children improve their skills.
 - Expect and reward honesty, mutual respect and empathy.
 - Encourage gratefulness since this increases the chance of happiness later in life.
-

Michael D. Zito, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist with offices in Watchung and Morristown. He practices clinical, sport and performance psychology with children through adults and can be reached at 908-753-8696 or MichaelZitoPhD@yahoo.com

Dr. Zito welcomes your questions and ideas for future articles. The information provided in this article is for informational purposes only and is not intended to treat any person or condition. Seek professional services if treatment is needed.