

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN YOUR CHILD

Child: "I hate school. I don't want to study anymore."

Parent: "No you cannot stop schooling. You must go to school; pass your exams and then you can get a good job."

Child: "What for?"

Parent: "So that you can have a good life and be happy."

Child: "I don't care. I hate school. I hate you."

When I started inquiring what really happened, the child related how he had failed his exams and since then his interests in studies had waned to the point of being totally negative about school attendance.

This has happened to quite a few children I see in the counselling room. Children put the label "Stupid" or "Loser" on themselves after their initial successes in the Primary levels. They were told they were clever, intelligent and smart so they take rejection and failure so hard that they slip into withdrawal and depression often oblivious to their parents.

Parents need to be sensitive to the changing situations as their children progress in school. There is a lot of adjustment pressures placed on our children today to be successful and achieve. And the problem is especially acute with children who succeed because inevitably there will be a failure round the corner. Disappointments can occur in an academic or sports or relationship arena for your child and the question is "Is your child resilient enough to survive it?"

Recently a university student killed himself ostensibly because he was suffering setbacks in his academic work. Although we all know that school can be a pressure cooker, yet many parents forget that our children are trying their best. When they don't make the grade, they are as disappointed, if not more, than their parents are. In such circumstances, parents need to be understanding and supportive. And an important measure parents can do is to build resilience in their children.

Resilience is like learning to ride a bicycle. When I was a young boy, I learnt to ride a bicycle with my neighbour's adult bike. (We could not afford a kid's bike). It was a heavy, tall bike. I fell numerous times and bloodied my knees but I was determined because I did not want to be the only one who can't ride a bike in the neighbourhood gang. So I had a few scars to show for it today. What I learn though is that resilience is the willingness to keep trying and not give up. It helped when friends were at hand shouting encouragements of "Go, go, go..." All the while I knew that I'd be killed if my mom caught me doing this.

Here are some tips to building resilience in your child:

1. Be aware of your child's emotions.
2. Recognize emotions are an opportunity to connect and be your child's cheerleader
3. Listen and look with empathy.
4. Help the child name her emotions.
5. Set limits and find good solution together.