

Why kids need to be resilience-proofed

Robyn Pearce says over-protected children grow up to be weak adults



I was enjoying a meal recently with a small group when (not surprisingly) the conversation turned to the current economic climate. The party included my oldest son, a Lt Colonel recently back from a two-year stint at Puckapunyal, Victoria and currently working on some very high-level New Zealand Defence projects, and my good mate Allie Mooney, one of New Zealand's top women speakers.

The conversation then flowed on to how the experiences of our early years had influenced our resilience levels. As it happened, almost everyone around the table, my son included, had experienced hardship, feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem and times of 'doing without' in our early years (and for some of us, me included, well into our adult lives.)

Our conclusion? Hardships and hard times are a precious gift. They teach us. They toughen

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us. They give us strength – *if* we approach them with the determination to overcome. Every one of us noted that if we'd not experienced those earlier tough times we'd not now be capable of doing the work we do, nor in a position to contribute to society in our various ways.

Soft adults struggle

Instead of talking about the young people you're dealing with right now, let's take a few minutes to consider the end product. Reflect for a moment on the adults you know. Have you noticed that those who've had an easy life as youngsters do it tough when the pressure comes on? Often the brightest ones, who've not had to work hard in school or even university, struggle the most when

complex tasks require solid application. Further to that, when times get tough and jobs get scarce, those same people are not well equipped to cope with the situation. Many of them find it scary, depressing and mighty uncomfortable.

On the other hand, if you've already been at the bottom of the pile, if you've already survived on the smell of an oily rag, if you've been unemployed or part of a group that the 'popular' crowd don't want to be bothered with, you know you can deal with economic blips – because you've done it before.

Learning by failing

Many readers are parents as well as working in education, so let's consider our child-raising techniques. I speak from the perspective of having raised six children, five of them boys, and now as a grandmother of 12.

I profoundly believe that if we make our children's lives soft and easy, if we take away risk and challenge, if we always seek to protect our children from adversity, we weaken, damage and distort the precious young lives we're entrusted with. Of course we protect them from danger when they're little, but danger and adversity are *not* the same thing. Real danger is life-threatening; adversity is just a situation that we have choices on – choices of attitude, choices of action.

Although many people know this intellectually, how often do you hear successful people – who *have* experienced tough beginnings – say “I don't want my kids to have to go through the hardships I did.” So they bend over backwards, spend vast amounts of money, do everything they can to smooth the path for their children, to make life easy for them.

And in the school environment, look at the trend towards not making any kid feel like a failure. This is *not* preparing them for the real world – no boss is going to say “Never mind the stuff-up you made, or the major customer your mistake just cost us.”

I might be a slow learner in some things but I've had enough years to finally notice that there is a direct relationship between kids who have life too easy or have been over-protected and

adults who lack resilience, are often also selfish, self-centred and dysfunctional and who seldom rise to their potential.

Many people with wonderful easy childhoods, with every advantage and everything they want lavished on them, end up living adult lives of boredom, emptiness and quiet desperation. Softness makes us weak and ineffective.

If you're a gardener, think of the process of turning tender plants into ones that can cope with a tough environment. My husband and I live on the shores of a tidal estuary. It's a very harsh environment for a garden – salt-laden wild west winds are the norm and the soil isn't brilliant. Our landscaper, when discussing our planting options, said: “Make sure any plants you purchase have been hardened off. Most nurseries don't do it. They raise their plants in very protected enclosures. If your plants haven't had a bit of exposure to wind, sun, cold and rain before you transplant them, they won't survive in your rough conditions.”

Building resilience

So how do we develop resilient young people? It's too big a topic for this forum, but here are three of my basic rules and a really useful book if you're interested in more.

◆ From an early age let them feel the

consequences of their actions. Let the punishment fit the crime.

- ◆ Don't give them everything they want. Make them earn and save for their rewards and treats.
- ◆ Link pocket money to tasks. It's not a right.
- ◆ Read Maggie Mamen's book *'The Pampered Child Syndrome – how to recognize it, how to manage it, and how to avoid it. A guide for parents and professionals'* 2004 (Rev. ed. 2006).

I'm glad about the economic mess the world is in right now. We need it. To become an effective nation and effective people we must become resilient again. Resourceful and resilient people and companies thrive. They're prepared – with the right attitude. They know how to rise above immediate circumstances, they have the long view and they have determination.

This is a great time to be alive.



Robyn Pearce is an international author and speaker. Check out www.gettingagrip.com for heaps of tips on time savng

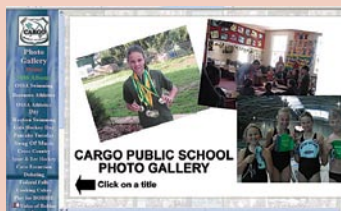
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