

Parent Concerns - To Go Up to School, or Not? That is the Question

As a school we look for opportunities to reward students with verbal praise, certificates and ultimately pins for demonstrating resilience. Of the four Rs (Responsibility, Respect, Relationships and Resilience) it is the demonstration of resilience which is the most difficult to recognise and acknowledge.

What opportunities do you provide your children with to cope with disappointment, hurt and frustration? Coping with these is a skill needed for all of life. Sometimes our needs and wants are not able to be fulfilled and when this happens we feel upset and frustrated. Teach your child that feelings are transitory – they come and go, so even bad feelings do pass. For example, students in the Junior School will learn of their new class grouping at the end of the term and may find that some of their friends are in the other class, or that the teacher they hoped would be teaching them, will be teaching another class. The feeling of disappointment will perhaps be expressed and to help with developing resilience, acknowledge and name the feeling (disappointment, upset, letdown) and then find a positive in the situation. For example, 'I can see you are feeling disappointed that ... is not in your class next year but isn't it great that ... is with you?', 'I don't think you've ever been in the same class as ... so this will be a good opportunity to get to know him/her'.

Children can be encouraged to learn from experiences of disappointment. They may like hearing about your own difficult experiences as a child and what positive things you learnt from them.

When researching information regarding building resilience in children we came across the article below written by Michael Hawton, a child psychologist based in Byron Bay. The article was presented to the Independent Primary School Heads Association (IPSHA) of which SMC is a member. We have Michael's permission to use it in our school newsletter. We are interested in your perspective and would love some feedback on this article please. ***'To go up to the school, or not? That is the question'***. Michael Hawton, Child Psychologist (MAPS) and Parentshop founder.

If you've had a child at school for more than a few years, chances are that there have been times when you have considered whether to go up to the school about an issue that is affecting your child. Working out what requires your intervention can be tricky. Sometimes your child's passionate pleas for you to do something can be persuasive. It might be that your child has been moved from one class to another or that your son has been denied permission to go on a much-anticipated excursion or there has been an incident on the playground.

Parents can sometimes feel like they are not parenting properly unless they go to the school to address the problem.

In recent years, Australian schools have been dealing with an increasing number of parents coming to the school. I say this as a result of speaking with hundreds of school leaders across Australia and internationally. So, what is causing this?

1. Many parents are less trusting of institutions in charge of the care of their children, including schools. They are therefore less willing to give school staff the benefit of the doubt when it comes to making decisions that involve their children.
2. There is an increasing number of parents who have become more anxious about their children and tend to intervene in smaller and smaller issues.
3. Many of these parents have lost the ability to see that frequent interventions ultimately undermine a child's sense of competency and confidence.

So, how do you decide if an issue warrants your intervention?

First, if your child is in physical or psychological danger then you should intervene. However, if the issue is not of this magnitude, ask yourself this; what would happen if I didn't go to the school about this issue?

An important part of being a parent is helping children learn to deal with disappointments and difficulties. We can help our children learn to cope emotionally with uncomfortable feelings by being there and listening to them. We can acknowledge that sometimes life is challenging or unfair but that we can learn to cope with this. Helping our children recognise emotions and deal with them, without being crushed by them, teaches our children emotional resilience.

We can help our children feel more competent by helping them think of some alternative ways to deal with a problem, which empowers them by giving a sense of agency and control.

With this in mind, some issues are worth recognising before you come to the school in search of a remedy on your child's behalf.

First, recognise that the school must make 'system' decisions. While all schools try to follow principles of fairness and equity, it is not always possible to decide matters fairly. There will always be cases where some children will not get the teacher they wanted or be seated close to their friends.

Second, recognise that all school staff aspire towards providing an environment where the best interests of the child are held paramount. While teachers may not have the same attachment to a child that a parent does, the majority of school staff care personally for the children in the school.

Third, recognise that each time a parent jumps in where a problem could be resolved by their child, they may be robbing them of an opportunity to develop resilience skills.

Making a decision about whether or not to go up to the school is about assessing the problem and seeing if it can be an opportunity to help your child to learn to manage their emotions, increase resilience and become an independent problem solver.

About the author:

Michael Hawton is founder of Parentshop, providing education and resources for parents and industry professionals working with children. He has authored two books on child behaviour management: *Talk Less Listen More* and *Engaging Adolescents*. You can find more information, including his books and self-paced online parenting courses, at <https://www.parentshop.com.au/parent-courses/>

We would love to hear your ideas on how you develop and acknowledge resilience in your children, as well as your response to the article. Please email feedback to either Gai or Andrea.

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