

Helicopters ... and lawnmowers?



**it takes a
village**

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We all want the best for kids—our own, our neighbors', other people's, those across the oceans. Our little ones are our hope for the future. So what we do as parents, as neighbors, as the village to nurture kids best?

Wouldn't an easy answer be fabulous? I have wished time after time for the teachers' edition of the parenting textbook. There are always answers at the back of the teachers' edition! But, alas, there are few we-know-it-ahead-of-time absolutely correct answers when it comes to parenting questions because the children and adults involved are human, complete with inexplicable and ever-changing preferences, strengths and quirks. Parenting is, however, part art and part science so there are some guiding principles that could be in a textbook.

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tion the child can do it] and the coping skills, and therefore the resilience, that make adaptive recovery from challenge possible. As an added bonus, researchers tell us that the very characteristics that are likely to encourage our child's emotional well-being are the same ones that will make them successful in the classroom."

That optimism that children can handle and learn from challenge and failure is provided by the child's family and com-

One is that we need to let kids fail. That's tough because we *really* want them to have the best chance to be successful, and that's a natural desire. But how much sheltering is too much? Helicopter parents hover close to their little (and not so little) ones. Bubble-wrapping parents let them go a little farther afield but not without a protective coating. This was a new one for me this week: lawnmower parents. Lawnmower parents mow down barriers so their kids have an easier path from here to there.

Again, that we-are-humans thing comes up. Sometimes hovering, bubble wrapping and mowing makes sense. But sometimes we got too far. When I worked at UCSBI had a couple parents contact me seeking internships for their college-aged students. Whoa. Well intentioned? Absolutely. Going too far? Seems pretty likely barring an extenuating circumstance that was not explained.

Children will grow up to face the world—by themselves, at times without parents or family or their village. So we must enable them and letting them learn to cope with failure and to learn from failure. Psychologist Madeleine Levine writes in "Teach Your Children Well: Why Values and Coping Skills Matter More than Grades, Trophies, or 'Fat Envelopes,'" "we know (albeit reluctantly) that life will throw curveballs at our children regardless of how hard we may try to protect them. The growth (emotional, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual) needed to make one's way through life comes out of challenge, and challenge can bring disappointment, anger, and frustration.... What we really want to cultivate is well-being, which includes a generous portion of optimism [assump-

tion]. Those extended family members can tell the kids in your life stories about loved ones falling down and getting back up and persevering. If they did it, so can you! Another optimistic word is yet. When a child in your life complains that they can't swim a length of the pool or read or make friends, an optimistic response is that they can't do it *yet*. What skills can the child learn over time to help them get there no matter how long it takes? Couple the yet with a very large and deliberate I've got your back and I value you deeply no matter what and you have a recipe for both confidence—and skill—building.

We as parents and extended family will still be there, loving them without regard to the accomplishments we'd hoped they would have, holding the optimism that they will blossom into the flowers that they will be—independent, able to face adversity with a knowing twinkle in their eye, and the ability to get back up after falling down. That's certainly part of what we want to accomplish in this complex work of raising children. Don't worry, though, I'll keep looking for that parenting textbook that has all the answers and makes your very important role easy!

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