

Raising Courageous, Compassionate Kids

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While it's important to protect and reassure our children in today's turbulent times, it's also important to focus on courage and understanding. If we completely shield our children from every challenging situation, they are likely to become more vulnerable to manipulation, fear, and intimidation. Today, it's especially important to find a balance between protecting our children and teaching them to courageously and compassionately protect themselves and others.

By nurturing *courage* and *compassionate understanding* in our children, we can give them the tools to put their hearts into action. Courage is not necessarily the absence of fear; it can be standing up to or facing our fear—even though we're frightened. Fear and anxiety are a normal part of life and are not always negative. Anxious or fearful feelings can warn children of real problems and help prevent them from making poor decisions. For example, "street smarts" can be a beneficial state of anxiety; when children activate their nervous systems to a higher level of attentiveness, it can keep them alert and safe from harm.

But anxiety and fear can also be extremely destructive if it escalates into intense terror and panic. Much more so than the actual events themselves, children's reactions to fear and anxiety will affect the quality of their lives, both emotionally and physically. Their response can lead to personal growth, or it can impair that emotional growth. When children respond to the emotions of fear and anxiety by become stressed, it can affect their ability to take effective action as well as to be happy and experience pleasure.

Courage is an important virtue which can help a child to attain a goal such as jumping off of a diving board. But when courage is combined with understanding it can enable children to do the right thing and take action in a situation. For instance, courage and compassion might motivate a child to tell a friend to stop teasing or playing too roughly with a puppy and it might inspire a teenager to come to the defense of a friend who is the victim of malicious gossip. Confucius taught that to become a warrior one had to practice one essential rule, "As you wish others to treat you, so you must treat others." Kids need to learn that the golden rule means courageously putting your compassion into action. Genuine understanding and compassion is a wish for the well-being of other people and for every living being in the universe. It comes from a feeling of empathy—an ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and understand how they feel. We cannot control all of the things that will happen in our children's lives. As parents, it takes a great deal of understanding and courage to realize that the best way to protect our children is to teach and allow them to protect themselves.

Ways to Nurture Courage and Understanding:

Encourage children's dreams. Anticipate success and encourage the belief that your child can do, be, or have anything that he or she desires.

Encourage perseverance. When we encourage our children to try, try, try again, we are helping them to develop the courage to get up after a setback and to have faith in their ability to succeed.

Teach children relaxation and self-calming skills. Children become more resilient to fear-inducing situations when they can mindfully quiet and relax themselves and interrupt the fight-or flight response.

Desensitize your child to his or her fear. By gradually exposing your children to their fears, you will be helping them to take progressive steps toward overcoming them.

Clear up misconceptions. Discuss the reality of your child's fear in a manner that's appropriate for their age and developmental level.

TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

Demonstrate compassion and empathy through your actions, words, and thoughts.

Teach children to seek a win-win situation. Replace the idea of “I want me to win and you to lose” with, “I win when everybody wins.”

Build a child's self concept. Children who have a positive self concept will be more likely to see the good in others.

Dubbed “The Dream Maker” by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.