



10 things you can do today to cultivate inner-strength in your child

Whether your child is challenged by day-to-day pressures like homework or big changes like the separation or divorce of parents, they are learning how to manage their emotions. Those of us with adult experience know that intense feelings such as grief, fear or even joy, can be distracting and confusing. Intense feelings and stress are a normal part of life but children are learning how to

manage those feelings for the first time. There are some simple things that all parents can do to help their children deal with life's emotional demands and simultaneously develop resilience that will help them in the future. This tip sheet offers 10 strategies that parents can keep in mind as they guide their children through school, friendships and family life lessons.

1. Try to stay calm:

It's normal to get angry or irritated sometimes. Learn to recognize your "triggers" which are the things that lead you to lose your patience. Giving yourself a few moments and taking a few deep breaths can make a big difference. Choose a "quiet area" where you or other family members can go if they need a moment to calm down. You may need to stop talking and leave the room for a while in order to think clearly.

2. Focus on strengths:

When your child brings home a test or a report card, talk first about what he or she did well. Then talk about what can be improved. Praise your child's unique strengths rather than criticizing the things that they need to learn to do better.

3. Talk about feelings:

Children first learn that their feelings are important through their family. Behaviours are driven by needs and feelings. If you want to understand why your child chose a behaviour, first seek to understand how they are feeling about it. You can let your child know that you care about their feelings even if you didn't like the things they did with those feelings. With a better understanding of your child's feelings, you will be better able to help them choose new ways of meeting their needs.

4. Choose consequences carefully and follow up consistently:

Sometimes parents say things in anger that won't help their child to learn or improve in the long run. It can be tempting to say things like, "No television for a month because of what you did." Both you and your child know that after one or two days the TV may be back on. Try taking a deep breath and then give yourself a little time to think. Then select consequences that are fair,

realistic, and related to the behaviour you want them to change. Then let them know what the consequences are, what behaviour led to the consequence, and how they can prevent the consequence in the future or repair the situation.

5. Be careful not to use humiliation or sarcasm:

Adults are often hardened by life experience but children are much more delicate than they sometimes appear. Using sarcasm or humiliation may feel like a way of demonstrating a point that the child is missing and seems obvious to an adult. The unintended consequence is often a loss of self-confidence and feelings of abandonment that can lead to serious social and emotional problems. Harsh criticism also hurts the bond of trust between parent and child. Remember that you are your child's guide and they are entitled to make mistakes as they learn new skills.

6. Be willing to apologize:

Parents need to role model maturity by apologizing and learning from mistakes if they want children to learn those skills. It is okay to admit mistakes or change your mind or correct your words. Try to explain your thoughts and feelings calmly so your child can understand. By sharing your lessons and thoughts, you can also teach your child about dealing honestly with problems in respectful ways.

7. Give children choices and respect their wishes:

When children are given an opportunity to make choices, they learn how to solve problems. If parents make all of their children's choices for them, they don't have an opportunity to learn this important set of skills. Encouraging children to recognize their preferences, make decisions and solve problems teaches them to be confident and develop a voice that they will use to be strong in other relationships, school and eventually in their work.

8. Ask questions that help children to solve problems on their own:

When parents recognize that their child is facing a decision, the easy thing to do is to step in and take over. Sometimes that is helpful but it can also be an opportunity to encourage them to approach their problem like an adventure. Asking questions is a great way to help them decide what to do. Examples include, “What are some of the things you could do in this situation?” and, “If you choose that, what do you think will happen next?”

9. Read books and stories together:

Reading stories aloud is a fun way to share some enjoyable time together and learn about life from the safety of your home. Stories explore the challenges and options of life in dramatic ways that can be fun, silly, sad, and inspiring without being scary. You can talk about the ways that the people in the stories deal with common issues like making or losing friends or handling decisions.

10. Encourage sharing and helping:

Learning to share and help gives children a chance to feel successful and offers lessons about relating to others. There are many ways to do this. Together you and your child can sign up

to help a local charity of interest on www.volunteer.bm or spend a Saturday together on a fund-raising walk. This teaches children that they have the power to make a difference and caring about others teaches them to understand what genuine care is about so they can become good at giving and receiving in relationships.

The emotional lessons that children learn from their parents are powerful and long lasting. By practicing these ten tips, you can help your child to recognize and manage their emotions, develop care for others, build positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and cope during challenging times.

Resource: <http://casel.org>

If you would like more information on this topic you can contact Family Centre and ask to speak with the Community Support Worker at 232-1116.