

### **All Moments are Needed**

A friend said that she would never have become the hard-working adult, tender-hearted mother and loving wife she is if it had not been for the challenging times of her childhood. She backed this belief up with specifics. Middle school taught her about betrayal and how you could not immediately trust everyone with your most private thoughts and feelings. Her aunt's struggle with cancer and death at a young age impressed upon her that none of us are guaranteed a long, healthy life. A low grade she earned in high school when she was "boy crazy" provided the reality contact that she will only get out of life what she puts in, and that there is no cavalry waiting in the wings to rescue her from the messes of her own creation.

How can we apply this to our day-to-day parenting? So many parents seem to act as if their role is to prevent their children from any upset or disappointment. If the children audition for a talent show and do not get in, parents may worry that their self-esteem will be injured.

An alternative approach based on the idea that "all moments are needed" would be to talk with the children about the fact that there are many children with talent and there was only so much time possible for the talent show. The parent could also take advantage of this disappointing moment to teach that there will always be children who sing and dance better, and that in general, it is not realistic to expect to get every opportunity or every award they want. And it is not just singing, dancing and talent shows; there will always be children who are smarter or have more athletic ability. After all, life was not created for the purpose of meeting their wishes and hopes and is not organized for their comfort! What an important life lesson, even though we feel hurt whenever our children feel hurt or disappointed.

This might at first glance seem insensitive, as if it does not honor what the child is experiencing. But what this approach does is help the child realize that disappointments are a normal part of life. Parents help children learn how to deal with disappointments. They do not mobilize their resources to make the disappointment magically go away.

There are so many forces urging us to focus on the short-term that it requires purposeful effort on our part to focus our parenting on the long-term. If our children earn a disappointing grade in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade, can we be far-sighted enough to see that this kind of moment is

needed? How else can our children learn that there is no cavalry? We will not rescue them from the grade they just earned, nor will we nag and remind them to do what they need to do. In fact, one of the best ways for children to learn how to be organized and stay on top of their responsibilities is for us to refuse to organize them or stay on top of their responsibilities for them. Perhaps the greatest gift we can give our children when they bring home their first disappointing grade is to remove them from their team, put away the electronic games, enforce the “No TV” rule and use any other consequence we choose.

We do not have to lecture or raise our voice, and we do not have to become tense and irritable. All we have to do is hold them accountable and show them that we love them the same regardless of the grades they bring home. This is where parenting gets hard. How are we supposed to stay clear-headed and calm when our 10-year-old says, “Who cares about school!” as they show us their first D. The temptation to rant and rave, to go on and on is huge and powerful. I think it is the parents who believe that all the moments are needed, even the unwanted ones, who are able to lean on this long-term focus for the strength to stay calm. Instead of yelling and threatening, we say, “This grade is unacceptable and therefore you will have consequences.” The tone is loving and optimistic, and we follow through on what we say. It is by protecting the connection with our children during the disappointing times that we allow them to focus on the mistakes they just made. This is what turns the unwanted moments of childhood into moments that build character.

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