

IF WE ALWAYS ENCOURAGE KIDS AREN'T WE RAISING WEAKLINGS?

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When I give a presentation on parenting, especially to legitimately “self-made” people, the title question is inevitable. I understand the point. The emphasis on self esteem today has, at times, overtaken good judgment when challenging children to overcome obstacles. Underneath, some parents are afraid that undue support to children will give them the idea that they do not have to be tough. The key words here are “undue support.” Toughness at the right time in this competitive world is an important trait. Parents certainly have to model and teach fortitude and strength. With that in mind, it is hard to picture giving encouragement to a child when their ability isn't fully developed.

Let's ask what forms toughness in a well-formed product? Following that, what forms strength or toughness in children? Solid internal framework is the answer.

I have watched good carpenters. They measure properly and measure again before cut and construction. Children are like wood. All need construction. A trait of a good carpenter is that they have a good eye for the parts of the product and then, what it might look like put together. Parents need to have a good eye for parts of their child's make-up. The constancy of daily life and the frustration of how childlike children are, does not give a ready picture of the end product of a child's life. If a parent is focusing on and then commenting on the child's foolishness or failure, it will be tiring for the parent and discouraging for the child. How do you assess a child's parts and picture the product when it comes to parenting? The eye for small steps or parts in a child's development needs to be trained. In a parent just like the carpenter, an eye for good parts not yet put together is key. Look for and reinforce effort as a way to construct strength.

For children who are not making good progress in an area, support the process not the product. Encouragement says “Before that problem hit, you worked hard on that. Let's give a look toward solving the problem. You've solved such things before.” It speaks to effort. When effort is small, speaking to desire can be a start. “I can see you want to do this, let's see where you can make a small start.” (A big start can be overwhelming.)

Where strength is needed, the parent needs to apply the wood glue of encouragement not the hammer of critique. Encouragement is speaking to the child about small efforts and little accomplishments as you lead them on the path to the end of a thing. A parent must not wait until a discouraged child completes something half-heartedly. It is the lack of support in the structure along the way that makes something weak. The Bible teaches that we must not withhold good when it is ours to give (Proverbs 3:27-28).

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