Ref: I am I have, I can. What Families Worldwide Taught Us About Resilience.Edith Grottgerg. National Educational Services

Why We Must Stop Fixing Our Children: Solving the Parenting Paradox

From a distance, the lake and surrounding forests were an idyllic setting. Along the shore a father was teaching his young son to fish. This appeared to be a wonderful teaching moment. Yet as we approached it became clear that the father was frustrated and the child was unhappy.

"You've got to hold the rod straight and cast straight ahead."
"I'm trying."
"How many times do I have to show you?"
"I want to do it my way!"
"You're going to break it!"
"I don't care!"

What had begun as a father's well-intentioned effort to teach his child to fish, digressed into an angry, unfulfilling experience for both father and child. This pattern begins innocently enough when our children are two or three years old. It starts with just a few words uttered by every well-meaning parent.

"Let daddy show you how to do it."
"Let mummy fix it for you."

Unknowingly these words of assistance, guidance or education mark the entry into the parenting paradox. A paradox is a contradictory idea often at odds with common sense yet possibly true. The parenting paradox affects most families. We correct our children under the mistaken belief that if we tell, show or direct them they will listen, observe and improve. How else will they learn, we wonder, if not shown the errors of their ways - whether in school work, sports or table manners? We would like our children to learn life's lessons without mistake or blunder. These errors of youth we worry will hurt our children psychologically or physically. Listen to me we say. We're the parent, we've been there, done that, made mistakes. We can help you. Our motives are noble. They reflect the very reason we became parents, to guide a youngster into a happy, healthy life's journey. Young children's responses to our offers of guidance and assistance are as varied as their personalities. At one extreme some children watch and listen but then don't do, beginning a pattern of helplessness, passivity and low initiative. At the other extreme some young children respond with resistance, exhibiting a pattern of behavior that we quickly label stubborn or strong willed. This sets the stage for families destined for angry conflicts. Although the majority of young children tolerate our "helping behavior," our actions accomplish little towards our ultimate goal of developing resilient and healthy children.

But somewhere along this path we became stuck in the paradox - if I don't help you how will you ever learn? But on so many occasions when I correct, show or even offer to help - things get worse not better. Our noble message - I'm your parent let me help - over many years either becomes deluged in conflict or complacency on our children's parts. Seemingly beyond our control, helping from our perspective becomes synonymous with fixing while through the eyes of our children it is too frequently experienced as a lack of acceptance of their abilities.

Helping is Not Fixing

If we examine our parental goals, we discover that many center around assisting our children to feel competent, secure, happy, caring, and self-reliant. It is not an oversimplification to conclude that to realize these goals requires our children to develop the inner strength to deal competently and successfully, day-after-day with the challenges and demands they encounter. We are aware that our children will feel more competent and self-assured and more capable of solving problems that confront them if helped to deal effectively with challenging situations. Why is it then that what begins as our effort to help often results in the parenting paradox and our children's "resistance to being fixed." For some parents it is the words they choose and their tone of voice and body language, suggesting criticism rather than encouragement. For others it is the rush to tell the child what to do rather than engaging the child in the exciting process of discovering a solution. As parents we must not allow our efforts to help our children be transformed into exercises in fixing them. We must interact with them in ways that allow them to view our input not only as desirous but as helpful. Learning to support our children in ways that are truly helpful is part of the process of raising resilient youngsters. Resilience embraces the ability of a child to deal more effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to bounce back from disappointments, adversity and trauma, to develop clear and realistic goals, to solve problems, to relate comfortably with others and to treat one's self and others with respect.

Solving the Parenting Paradox

We offer four guidelines to solving the parenting paradox. These guidelines, begun when our children are young, will help us avoid

falling into this paradox. We are not suggesting if these guidelines are first applied at a later age that they cannot be effective. However, if we begin to refine effective patterns of helping our children when they are young, they are more likely to be responsive and listen to us as they grow.

Guideline One: Let Empathy Be Your Guide. Empathy is the ability to identify with feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of others. Taking the time not just to understand but to make an effort to experience our children's perspective is a key ingredient to being helpful. Empathy has been popularized as an important component of emotional intelligence. Being empathic facilitates communication and assists us to avoid the parenting paradox. An empathic parent asks, "Am I saying or doing things in a way in which my child will be most responsive to listening to and learning from me?" and "Would I want someone to talk with me the way I am speaking with my child?"

When parents consider these questions, they are more likely to assume a helping rather than a fixing posture, more likely to teach than to lecture. For example, if a child is struggling in school, many parents will exhort the child to "try harder" or "put in more of an effort." Yet, most children experience being told to "try harder" as accusatory and judgmental. When parents who are having difficulty with a task are asked, "Would you want someone to tell you to just try harder?" most say they would not. If we would not want something said to us, then we must avoid saying it to our children. A more empathic comment would be, "I can see that you are having trouble with your schoolwork. Maybe we can figure out what would help to make it easier." When a comment such as this is offered, the child is much more likely to listen and to be cooperative.

Thus, empathy is a starting point to help children locate areas of competence and success in their lives, to develop problem-solving skills, responsibility, compassion, and a social conscience. Empathy permits us to communicate the message to our children that we hear, feel, and understand their opinions; it helps us to find ways to validate what our children are saying and attempting to accomplish. This does not imply that we agree with everything our children think, believe or do but rather that we acknowledge what they are saying.

Guideline Two: Bite Your Tongue, Watch and Listen. Too often when we help our children we quickly express ourselves and tell them what to do. However, we must first learn to watch and listen. This guideline is rooted in empathy since to truly watch and listen implies that we are attempting to appreciate the world through the eyes of our children. Just as we observed our children take their first steps without offering advice or criticism, we must sit back and watch them experiment safely, make mistakes, learn from their experiences, and ultimately succeed. In many situations simply being present and supportive is the most helpful thing we can do. Too much advice, even if well-meaning, may easily be interpreted as criticism or may rob our children of developing self-reliance and resilience.

For instance, if a five-year-old is creating a building with blocks and the blocks keep falling over, rather than rushing in and building the structure for the child or criticizing the child by saying, "You're just not being careful. You always rush through things, it is more advisable to comment, "It's not easy getting the blocks to stay up. Can you think of a way that you can put them so they stay up?" By saying this, we communicate that we appreciate that a task may be difficult, but that there are other possible solutions for our child to consider.

Guideline Three: Understand Before You Respond. Closely tied to the first two guidelines is the third, namely, respecting what our children desire in a certain situation. Sometimes our children don't want our help, perceiving it as an intrusion into their lives or an indication that we don't trust in their abilities. Other times the help we offer is not consistent with the problem they perceive. When our attempts to assist our met with anger or rejection, we often become annoyed, either withdrawing from our children or more forcefully telling them what to do. Instead, if we understand what they are experiencing such as the child who is struggling to create a building with blocks or a child who is having difficulty with a school assignment, we can offer such comments as, "Is there anyway I can be of help?" or "If you need me, I am here" or "If I'm misunderstanding what you said, please let me know." Our children are more likely to approach us for guidance and support when we create an atmosphere in which they feel we are genuinely interested in understanding their point of view and do not come across as telling them what to do. If we are to create this atmosphere, we must think before we act, we must understand before we respond.

Guideline Four: Compliment and Be Patient. Opportunities Will Present Themselves. An adult we know once observed that he felt he grew up in a home where his parents seemed like his prosecuting attorneys rather than his defense attorneys. He said, "They always seemed to focus on what I did wrong and almost never mentioned what I did right." Parents who help rather than fix are more likely to focus on offering realistic positive feedback and encouragement when compared with parents who are prone to fix things. When the emphasis is on fixing, even well-intentioned parents can easily fall into a pattern of communicating what has been done incorrectly rather than on emphasizing their children's accomplishments. For example, when children learn to put their toys away, it is not unusual for one or two toys to remain on the floor. As obvious as it may seem, it is better for the parent to compliment and reinforce children for all the toys they put away before mentioning that there are still two toys remaining. A positive approach would be for the parent to say, "You did such a great job putting away so many toys, that if it's okay I'd like to put these last two toys away." Similarly, if a child who has been having problems with spelling, improves from 50% to 70% on a test, the parent should immediately comment on the improvement rather than wondering about the three words that were incorrectly spelled.

As parents we must recognize that learning is a process that takes time and practice. It can be difficult to be patient given the level of emotional energy and investment we have in our children. However, if we are patient, encouraging, and empathic we will be presented with numerous opportunities to teach our children in ways that will promote their confidence and problem-solving skills. We believe that if these four interrelated guidelines are followed, the parent paradox can be significantly minimized. We will use more effective skills to teach our children and they will be more responsive to learn from us. A teachable moment will generalize and result in lifelong lessons that our children will bring with them into any new and challenging situation. To replace fixing with helping and teaching is a basic aspect of raising resilient children.

Source Unknown

Teach your child to be persistent
by Michael Grose

Did you cringe when you read the title of this article because your child already persists at home to get what he wants?

Maybe your child whines continually until someone caves in or throws tantrums to get his or her own way.

There is another type of persistence that children and young people need if they are to experience success in any area of their lives.

It is the ability to persist when work gets hard or life gets tough. It is having the 'stickability' to work through difficulties and hang in there when things don't go their way.

Some children are more naturally predisposed to persist than others. They have a determined, even competitive streak in their temperament that doesn't allow them to give in. These children and young people can drive themselves very hard to succeed and drive their parents and
teachers nuts in the process.

As with every habit or personal quality there is an environmental and parental influence. In other words, we can make life easy for children so that they are not expected to persist or hang in there when things are tough. There are so many options available for children these days that they can afford to sit back and pick and choose the easy options.

Parents who allow children to stop work when it gets too hard, give up on a sport because they are not succeeding straight away or have a coach or teacher they don't like are not developing persistence or 'stickability' in children.

Children show positive persistence when they continue to try hard at school even when they feel like giving up; they refuse to be distracted by their peers and complete lengthy assignments on time.

They show positive persistence when they continue playing a sport until the end of the season even though they may not get sufficient game time to their liking.

They show positive persistence when they work toward a set of goals or awards over a number of years in such programs as Guiding or Scouting.

Parents can promote persistence by encouraging their children to keep going and not giving in at the slightest hurdle or difficulty.

You may be a sounding board for their gripes but show your confidence in their ability to cope and get through their difficulties. "You can do it" is far more powerful in terms of promoting an attitude of persistence than "If it is a little too hard then try something else."

Let children know that there is a correlation between effort and success. In fact, they need to learn that by GIVING EFFORT they will experience more success.

Talk about WORKING TOUGH with your children. They need to understand that to be successful they need to do things that are NOT fun or easy. While it would be good if all work and learning was fun, in reality, this not the case.

Help children remember times when they experienced success by HANGING IN when they were younger. The ability to persist in the face of difficulties maybe an old-fashioned quality but it is one of best success attributes that your children will ever develop.How to spot an overparented child and what to do about it by Michael
Grose

For years social welfare agencies, schools and other child-focused organisations have been aware of the problems relating to a children who are underparented. A civilised, compassionate society needs to protect its most vulnerable members including those children who are at risk due to inadequate, poor or in some cases violent parenting .

In recent years there has emerged another type of parenting that, whilst never as harmful as underparenting, can be detrimental to children's healthy development– that is, the trend by many of the current generation of parents to overparent their children.

Overparenting occurs when parents solve children's problems rather than give them the chance to overcome problems themselves. It occurs when parents allow children to avoid legitimately challenging situations so they won't be inconvenienced. It also occurs when too much control or too much order is imposed on children.

Overparenting is predominantly a mindset. It is a belief that children can't overcome difficulties themselves and they can't cope with discomfort or disappointment. It comes with increased affluence but it can occur in any socio-economic group. From my observation, it is more likely to occur in smaller rather than larger families or in families where a death has occurred or tragedy has been a visitor.

An overparented child is a protected, spoiled child. He or she often lacks real confidence and won't take many risks. An overprotected child avoids new situations and looks to hide behind his parents when difficulties or challenges arise.

An overparented child can be any age but often becomes more apparent in middle primary school when the challenges children meet start to multiply. The overparenting may have occurred in the early years but the results only become apparent during this stage.

Some children by their nature place more demands on their parents, which results in overparenting. They receive more attention, more material possessions and more spoiling than they need because they can so bloody-minded and so insistent that parents give in just for some peace and quiet.

Sometimes circumstances such as family breakdown or a change of circumstances can lead to overparenting or overprotection as a form of compensation for the inconvenience that has been caused. While a child's behaviour may lead to feelings of guilt overparenting in this manner doesn't do the child any favours in the long term.

How can a parent break from a pattern of overparenting? This is hard to do because overparenting can seem so normal. However if a child is so reliant on a parent that they think they can't cope without them then it is time to take some action.

Parental illness is one way to change overparenting, although it is not a recommended course of action. When a parent is incapacitated or sick for a lengthy period of time children generally have no choice but to fend for themselves in a whole range of ways. From my observation of families I am constantly amazed how children rise to a challenge when they have to.

Another way to kick the overparenting habit is to do so by stealth. Little by little parents need to pull back on the over-assistance that they provide children. They can start by insisting children walk to school (provided this is reasonable from the perspective of safety and their wellbeing), get themselves up each morning or other simple forms of self-help as required. When a new behaviour becomes the norm rather than the exception then it is best to look for another area to withdraw their assistance from.

Another way to defeat the overparenting habit it to give children ideas, tips and techniques to cope with their challenges rather than allow them to avoid or pull out of challenges. For instance, a child who wants to pull out of an after school class after three weeks because they haven't any friends may need some ideas about either how to make friends or make do without friends until the end of term.

It helps to develop a "Hang tough" attitude rather than a "Let's try something else when things get tough" attitude. Overparenting prevents children from developing a "Hang Tough" attitude.

From my experience those children who do best at school and beyond the school years are those who have parents whose first response is to teach and support rather than protect or compensate when social, physical or intellectual challenges occur. It also helps to have parents who show absolute, unwavering confidence in a child's ability to cope and fend for him or herself, yet be wise enough to know when children need their help and compassionate enough to lend a hand.

It is hard to get the balance right between developing real independence and not placing too much responsibility on children. It is essential for all sorts of reasons that childhood be protected, even prolonged. But that doesn't mean that children be closeted, spoiled or get every material good they want. Effective parenting is a balancing act between the head and the heart, between providing opportunities for resourcefulness and showing compassion, and between being a supportive parent and a protective parent.

Responsibility - the key to resilience - Michael Grose

Is resilience the flavour of the month in your school or community group?

Resilience in the 21st Century seems to be what self-esteem was to the 1980's - the holy grail that all sorts of programs for children aspire to promote.

I don't mean to make light of a vital concept but the notion has become so over-exposed that it seems to be used to justify the existence of less then satisfactory services and resources for children.

A quick review of the resilience literature suggests that resilient children seem to have four key traits - social competence, a sense of hope or optimism, a sense of independence and also the ability to solve many of their social or emotional problems.

Some children are more resilient than others due to their temperament or genetic make up. The literature also suggests that the environment that a child finds him or herself in can promote or hinder the development of resilience. A minimum of three factors needs to exist to maximise resilience. These are: 1.Emotional support from a respected or caring adult. 2 Plenty of opportunities to be an active contributor to the group a child finds him or herself in, and 3. The existence of optimism or hope amongst the adults that dominate a child's social groups.

Fortunately, most children grow up in conditions where these exist. Although I must say that children these days tend to be less than active participants in their family enterprises as well-meaning parents tend to overdo the protective stuff with children. By and large the conditions are right for the promotion of resilience in most Australian homes.

There appears to be one factor missing in this entire resilience dialogue. What place does a child play in the promotion of his or her own sense of resilience? It is almost as if resilience is a process rather than the result of a set of processes that come into play.

Resilience really belongs to the child and will never be developed unless a child or young person takes responsibility for his or her behaviour. Children who duck and weave personal responsibility by blaming others for their mistakes or misbehaviours or finding excuses for even the most minute blunders are minimising their opportunities to develop resilience.

The child who accepts responsibility for being late for school, behaving badly when his peers egged him on or making an honest but awful mess of a homework assignment is on the resilience track. In effect, by saying this mess-up is due to me he or she is more likely to change, learn something and also grow from the experience. Those children and young people who dodge personal responsibility are placing themselves on the mercy of circumstances and other people's good will. This is not a smart long-term strategy although some children and adults get by playing the BLAME GAME or using the BUT ITS NOT MY FAULT approach.

So what can you do when you meet a child who constantly finds excuses or who deflects responsibility for their misdemeanours? A hard one but I would start with reminding them in a humane and realistic way that they are making excuses or that really the buck stops with them. When they blame the dog for eating their homework or a parent for not getting them up in time for school, smile and remind them very firmly where responsibility lay and then let them experience the consequences of their mistakes or blunders (which could be nothing).

Sometimes children deflect responsibility simply because they can. So be insistent about where responsibility for behaviour lay. You can have some fun with this notion. I know one teacher who kept a list of the best excuses children had used on the wall in his classroom. He would ask children to add to the list when he heard a good one. A simple, fun way of placing the spotlight on what really is anti-social behaviour. Resilience is worth promoting. It is worth learning about. But it also worth remembering that it starts with children and is dependent on their ability to take personal responsibility for their actions.

Make Yourself Dispensable

By Thomas Haller and Chick Moorman

Are you at all interested in raising a thirty-year-old Nintendo player who lies around your house all day eating cold pizza and sucking up Diet Pepsi? Probably not. If you're like many of the parents who attend our parenting workshops, creating a thirty-year-old video game player is not high on your list of parenting goals. Our prediction is that you are probably a lot more interested in raising a responsible, caring, conscious youngster who, somewhere between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, is capable of leaving home and living successfully on his or her own.

Raising a responsible young adult, one who can function effectively in today's world, does not happen by luck, coincidence, or magic. It occurs only when parents set out to make it happen by working diligently and purposefully throughout a child's life to see that he or she learns about independence, responsibility, and personal power. It happens where and when parents work intentionally to make themselves dispensable in a child's life.

Are you interested in making yourself more dispensable so your child can become more responsible and independent? If so, use the suggestions below to help you move closer to your goal of raising an independent, autonomous, fully functioning young adult.

1.) Believe that making yourself dispensable is your main job as a parent. If you believe that your job is to be needed, that your central role is to do for your children, you will have a difficult time implementing the ideas that follow.

Helping doesn't always help. Sometimes it creates learned helplessness. When you do for your children the things they can do for themselves, you are overfunctioning. Overfunctioning begins with the belief that my children need me to do for them. Change that belief to: my job is to help my children do for themselves.

2) Refuse to do for your children what they can do or can learn to do for themselves. Do you do laundry for a teenager? Do you pack your fifth-grader's lunch? Do you tie the shoes and zip the coat of a six-year-old? Do you look up phone numbers for your fourth-grader? If so, you could be overfunctioning Remember, the more you function, the less your child has to

3.) If you want a behavior, you have to teach a behavior. Children do not naturally know how to bring in firewood, clean the fishbowl, set the table, dry the dishes, or take their own dishes to the sink after dinner. If you don't teach behaviors, you could end up doing them all yourself.

4.) Refrain from answering for your child. We recently overheard a conversation where a friend approached a parent and child and spoke to the child, asking her a direct question: "How are you doing today, Maria?" The mother responded for the child, replying, "She's not in a very good mood today." The silent message the parent delivered to the child was: "You don't have to speak up for yourself. I will take care of you."

When the doctor asks, "Why are you here today?," when the neighbor inquires, "What was your favorite birthday present?," or when Grandma wants to know, "How do you like school this year?," stay out of it. Allow your child to answer for him- or herself.

5.) Teach your child to ask for help. One way to do that is to not help them until they ask. Parents often rush in with help before the child has articulated a desire for help. Why would a child ever need to ask for help if help always arrives without asking?

6.) Teach children to solve their own problems. Do not say, "Don't say anything to your mother. I'll handle it for

you. I know your mother well, and I can catch her in a good mood."

Say instead, "You're going to have to handle this with your mother. Let me teach you what I know. I generally try to catch her in the afternoon because she gets real busy in the morning. If she's having a bad hair day, forget it. Also, she responds better if you make it sound like a suggestion rather than a demand. Hopefully, these tips will help. I know you can handle it." This style of speaking announces to your child that you believe in him and that you see him as capable.

7.) Refrain from rescuing children from experiencing the legitimate consequences of their actions. Do not rescue, save, bail them out, let them slide, accept excuses, or fail to hold them accountable for the choices they make. When you refuse to protect children from the choices they make, you allow them to take responsibility for their lives.

Raising responsible children is not an easy task. It takes effort, energy, and persistence. You can do that best when you take steps like the ones listed above to make yourself dispensable.

Thomas Haller and Chick Moorman are the coauthors of Teaching the Attraction Principle to Children: Practical Strategies for Parents and Teachers to Help Children Manifest a Better World. They are two of the world's foremost authorities on raising responsible, caring, confident children. They publish a free monthly e-zine for educators and another for parents. To sign up for them or to learn more about the seminars they offer teachers and parents, visit their websites today: www.thomashaller.com and www.chickmoorman.com

Teaching Your Kids to Take the Right Risks

by C.J. Simister, Future-Smart In this, the second of three short articles, education expert C. J. Simister describes a selection of fun, family-friendly ways in which parents can help their children to develop a positive and healthy attitude to risk-taking. While success at school is obviously very helpful, she argues that a total reliance on this may mean we are missing part of the picture.

There are other hidden ingredients – things she calls 'future-smart™' skills - that can make a huge difference to a child's success and happiness as he or she grows up and faces an exciting but ever more challenging future.

Risk Taking

It's so easy to slip into thinking that our job is to protect our children from every possible danger. After all, there sometimes seem to be so many potential threats out there – it's not surprising that the temptation is to wrap up our loved ones in cotton wool in order to keep them safe from harm.

And yet, in our heart of hearts, most of us realise this probably isn't the best way forward. The fact is, by cosseting our children, we make them more vulnerable. If children don't develop a healthy attitude to risk, then the danger is they'll either end up going out of their way to avoid challenge entirely (and thereby failing ever to discover just what they're capable of – as Anais Nin so eloquently put it, 'Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage') or being drawn indiscriminately to risk (because it's just so much more exciting than anything they were ever allowed to do at home).

You probably heard that frightening statistic that came out a while back – that one in four children between the ages of eight and ten has never played outside unsupervised. How is this possibly preparing them for the bold, exciting but very challenging world ahead? We need to find ways of increasing the level of risk in our children's lives – obviously gently and within reasonable limits – so that they learn to recognise the feelings and thought processes that are involved. They need to be taught to weigh up a risk, envisage the best and worst possible outcomes, recognise that they may end up getting it wrong/looking stupid/feeling scared – and then decide for themselves if the potential gains make it a risk worth taking.

When pushed to the edge of what we can do, we learn much more and much more quickly. It's just the same for our kids. Our aim has to be to raise strong, independent, thinking people who know they can cope with anything that comes their way.

Here are a few activities that may help to get you started:

1. In the Balance

Learning to weigh up the pros and cons when facing a decision lies at the heart of dealing intelligently with risk. With younger children, bringing out a set of 'decision scales' when an

interesting decision arises can be a really great way of helping them visualise the process.

You'll need a set of pan-balance scales, some building bricks and some sticky notes. Next time your child is wondering whether to go for it and take a particular risk – whether it's inviting someone new round for tea, trying out for a team or learning to swim in the deep end - take a few moments together to think of the best things that could happen if it goes well.

Write each idea on a sticky note, attach it to a brick and place it on one side of the scales. Then repeat for the bad points – what are the worst possible outcomes? Which side is heavier? On balance, is the risk worth taking?

Note that you could develop this activity by using different sized bricks. As each point is raised, ask your child whether they think it's more or less important - and select a larger or smaller brick accordingly. This is great for showing that it's not always the number of pros and cons that matters, but their relative importance.

2. Tug of War

An alternative for older children is to help them see decision making as a tug of war process. When thinking about whether to take a risk, encourage your child to write all their thoughts on individual sticky notes. They might like to ask friends and different members of the family for ideas to include as well. The resulting jumble of pros and cons can then be stuck on a tug of war line, from 'go for it' at one end to 'no way José' at the other!

The important thing is to let your child feel they're making the decision for themselves – you're just there to facilitate the process.

3. Risk 'o'meter

This idea was developed by Professor Guy Claxton and is a wonderfully visual way to encourage your child to assess risk. Create your own family 'riskometer' – it might look something like a height chart, with a scale that you and your child could decide on together, for example from 'little baby risk' to 'massive scary risk'.

Whenever a risk arises that your child feels (and you agree) is right to take, get them to decide beforehand where on the scale it should go. Risks can be noted on a piece of paper and possibly even illustrated, then stuck on the scale as a reminder of your child's bravery (regardless of course of whether or not the risk pays off).

4. Taking risks with food

Food offers a really good chance to help your child learn about taking risks within a very safe context. Heston Blumenthal – a UK-based TV chef - is my hero. Why not tell your kids about his restaurant, 'The Fat Duck', voted in 2005 as 'the best restaurant in the world'? Heston is the ultimate risk taker when it comes to food.

Breaking through traditional conventions, he experiments – very precisely and scientifically – to seek highly innovative new taste combinations that others wouldn't even dream of trying. The

result: cauliflower risotto with chocolate jelly, scrambled egg and bacon ice cream, salmon poached in liquorice gel, mango and Douglas Fir puree and, possibly his most famous dish, snail porridge!

Encourage your child to be a culinary risk-taker next time you're cooking together. This could either be by following a recipe, but then adapting it slightly – varying the quantities or substituting a different ingredient to see what happens - or, if you're feeling really brave, by allowing them to create their own entirely new 'Blumenthal' dish. There are only two rules:

(1) they have to record their recipe – ingredients and instructions – as they go along (just in case they create something truly magnificent, you can tell them); and (2) they – and you – must not only try the final product but also critically assess it. This means both of you acting as food critics and talking about what's good and bad about the taste that has been created – which could, of course, be a lot of fun!

Here are a few general tips that are worth remembering:

1. Change the way you praise your children

Instead of praising your kids for being clever and getting things right, praise them for the personal qualities they showed along the way. For instance, praise their level of effort and persistence, the originality of their ideas, the way that they thought through their options before making a decision or when they ask really interesting or unusual questions.

There's a fascinating reason for this. Research has shown that it can actually be damaging to focus on 'intelligence praise'. Particularly for girls, the suggestion that what we value most is a successful outcome may lead them to choose cautious, risk-averse behaviour in order to be sure of keeping that 'clever' label. Far better to give credit for the brave risk that unfortunately fails than for the safe option that led to success.

2. Model risk taking

I'm sorry to say it, but the ultimate best of all best ways to help teach your child about risk is by example! Your child needs to see you trying out new things, overcoming your fears and then not worrying too much if it all goes pear-shaped. Just think how much more powerful a strategy the 'Risk 'o' meter' would be if everyone in the family was willing to talk about and add their own risks to the display…

And don't be afraid to admit when things go wrong – it's great for your kids to see that this happens to adults too.

3. Stump them!

Plan for events and situations that are just that little bit beyond what your children normally and comfortably do. The idea is to help them recognise how it feels to be a little daunted and uncertain – to learn that this is absolutely natural for all of us. Support your children through these experiences. Encourage them, be with them, believe in them massively and let this show, but stand back at the end and they'll feel fantastic when they succeed in overcoming their

fears.

And when they don’t, help them learn that it’s not the end of the world. The very nature of risk means the outcome is unexpected – sometimes better, sometimes worse than hoped. What matters is that they had a go and they’re the stronger for it.

Stay tuned for the third of CJ Simister's series fo three articles on making your child ‘future-smart™’? *Helping your child to think creatively and innovatively*

... to be published in the coming weeks.

About the author

C.J. Simister is the Director of the innovative ‘Cognitive Development Programme’ at Northwood College, UK, Jane’s driving passion is to help children of all ages become more independent, more critical and more creative in their thinking.

The author of two books, ‘How to teach thinking and learning skills: A practical programme for the whole school’ (SAGE: 2007) and ‘The Bright Stuff: Playful ways to nurture your child’s extraordinary mind’ (Pearson: 2009), Jane works with schools and parents in the UK and internationally, offering practical support and advice in raising children who are active, resourceful thinkers, equipped with the skills and intellectual qualities necessary to allow them to make the most of their potential and to face and flourish in an exciting, but increasingly competitive world.