



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

Embracing humility and the unexpected

There are certain moments in parenting where you want to hang your head in disgrace and immediately disappear.

One of my moments came when my then 5-year-old daughter rounded the corner of my friend’s fancy home (during a fancy gathering for moms) surrounded by boys and holding a dead squirrel by the tail.

She was clearly the leader of this pack, marching toward me and the other adults to show off their discovery near the woods. Since none of the boys would touch the squirrel, my daughter volunteered.

They all looked so proud, these young explorers channeling their inner Daniel Boone and swaggering toward us like characters in a pioneer movie.

I screamed, freaked out and rushed my daughter to the bathroom. While lathering her hands with soap and scrubbing them raw, I wondered what the protocol was.

“Should I call my pediatrician?”

“Could she have contracted rabies?”

“What about other disgusting diseases that squirrels might carry?”

Dealing with wild animals was new territory for me. It was something I’d never thought to learn about, especially having daughters.

Later that night, I replayed the sequence of events for my husband. I needed a sounding board to help me think through the incident because in typical mom fashion,

I blamed myself. I felt like I’d dropped the ball in not teaching my daughter an important lesson that could have prevented the humiliation I felt.

I told my husband, “I simply never thought to tell her not to touch dead squirrels. It never crossed my mind that she might think that’s OK.”

Clearly this story is comical now, part of our family folklore that I’ll never let my daughter live down. And what I’m discovering as my kids grow up is how this story also illustrates the secret plight of every parent.

You see, we try so hard to prepare our kids for every situation. We try to prevent every dumb move and decision they might make by having talks on what they should and shouldn’t do.

And just when we think we’re doing well, when we’ve covered all the important bases and feel confident about our parenting and possibly even superior to other parents — BAM! Our kid pulls a fast one. They disappoint us in some blindsiding way. They come out of the woods with an ugly surprise that mortifies us because other parents are watching, and now they know the truth.

Our kids aren’t perfect ... and neither are we. Anyone who thinks otherwise is an absolute fool.

The upside of these moments is how they humble us. They keep us off the high horse. They make us more compassionate

toward other parents who may also be talking behind closed doors and asking questions like:

“Where did I drop the ball?”

“What did I not teach my child that I should have taught them?”

“What were they thinking?”

The fact is, all kids mess up. They will all make some dumb decisions that we never thought to discuss in advance. It’s not because we’re bad parents or they’re bad kids, but because we’re human and they are, too, and even the best parenting in the world can’t change our flawed nature.

If we’re parenting from a place of pride, the fall off the high horse could really hurt. It could make it hard to look other parents in the eye. Instead of worrying about our child, we’d be worried about how our child makes us look. Our priorities would be out of whack.

But if we’re parenting from a place of humility — as we’re called to do — we can avoid a painful fall. We can look other parents in the eye and say, “Yes, my child messed up. I’m going to help them get through this and remember how often I mess up, too.” We can put our child’s well-being over our ego and not worry about what other people think, because in the grand scheme of life, the opinions of people don’t matter.

What matters most is our child’s relationship with God, and where that is headed.

Humility in parenting is good and essential. The humble parent is someone who I enjoy being around and trust for advice. Staying humble is a journey, especially if the kids are doing well, but somehow life has a way of keeping us parents in our place.

Just when we think we’ve got this parenting gig nailed, a curve ball will come. Our child will round the corner toting a dead critter by the tail. In these moments, we are forced to admit we aren’t perfect parents and our kids aren’t perfect kids, but that’s okay because we love them anyway, even on their critter-toting days.

Every child deserves parents who are humble enough to love them unconditionally and wise enough to keep incidents in perspective. While some incidents might be embarrassing now, with a little time and distance, they might be retold with a sense of humor we gain through firsthand experience.

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