

Faith



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

Raising a brave child

“A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success.” - Unknown

I believe it's fair to say most parents want to raise brave children.

We want them brave in doing what's right. Brave in chasing their dreams. Brave in saying “no” when necessary. Brave in facing their fears.

But the thing about bravery is there's a lot of psychology involved. There are fears that mess with our psyche — and subsequently hold us back, shut us down or make us want to retreat.

So if we *really* want brave children, we need to think about these fears. We need to remember ourselves at their age and consider what did or didn't build our courage.

There are many fears that can prey on a child's mind, such as fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of being different and fear of embarrassment. But if you ask me, the most overwhelming fear for a child is the fear of losing your parents' approval.

Because deep down, we all crave our parents' acceptance. We desperately want their affirmation. No matter how old we get or how much success we achieve, we never outgrow the need to hear our parents say the five words that sound like music to our ears:

“I am proud of you.”

Now, I've been blessed parents who say this often and with conviction. Even as a young girl, I knew they meant it. Of the many things

they did to draw this shy child out of her shell, what made the biggest impact was celebrating my *efforts* above *results*. As long as I gave my absolute best and took on healthy risks, they were happy.

The expectations ended there.

To this day, I can picture my parents' faces the second I saw them after trying out for something. Even I didn't win, they beamed at the sight of me. They grinned and held their arms out to embrace me as if I had won.

Because in their eyes, I was a winner. I'd won not because of the final score, but because I'd pushed myself beyond my comfort zone, challenged myself and gained experience that would benefit me a lifetime.

In these moments, I learned to be brave again. I came to understand how losing wasn't the *end* of my story, but rather *part* of my story. Encouragement at the right time and from the right people is huge confidence boost. It can be just the thing a sensitive psyche needs.

My parents' reactions to my self-perceived “failures” made me willing to try again. Win or lose, they loved me the same, and that brought me comfort. Had they reacted differently or shown even a trace of disappointment, I would have hesitated to challenge myself the next time. Internal fears would have gotten the best of me.

This is why I feel so sorry for kids whose parents take a different approach than mine. Some parents live so vicariously through their children their emotions swing with the outcome. When the child does well, they're up. When the child

does poorly, they're down. The message this sends to kids is that they're lovable when they win, less lovable when they don't.

Quite frankly, I find it crazy to live in a world where parents scream at little league games, storm off after bad plays and pull sneaky moves to gain competitive advantages. Kids today are more stressed, anxious and depressed than ever before, and can we blame them? Imagine living up to the insane expectations set by many adults. Imagine giving your absolute best — and being told it isn't good enough.

I'm all for excellence, and I love to win. But with the world already telling our kids they're only as good as their last performance, they don't need added pressure at home. What they need is love they can count on because it's steady, and parents who are proud regardless of the outcome.

Is it great if our child gets the lead in the school play? Of course. *But the real victory comes when they audition on stage, overcoming jitters to read a script in front of judges.*

Is it awesome when our child's team wins a championship? Absolutely. *But the real victory comes when they grow closer as a team and rise to the challenge of a high-stakes game.*

Are we proud when our child wins the school essay contest? Definitely. *But the real victory comes when they find their voice, realize it matters and use it to impact others.*

Raising a brave child starts with being an encouraging parent. It means celebrating *efforts* above *results*. After years of coaching

third-grade basketball, my brother has noticed that whenever players make a good or bad play — such as score a goal or miss a shot — they immediately look at the stands. They're searching for their parents' reaction. The way a parent reacts carries so much weight. For better or for worse, our kids internalize it all.

Growing up my dad always said, “Do your very best, Kari, and leave the results to God.” Knowing I didn't have to control any outcome brought me peace. And now that I'm a mom, I try to pass on that peace. I encourage my kids to take healthy risks, put themselves out there and face their fears. I remind them that as long as they give 110 percent, they've done all they can do.

I love seeing how my girls change after a brave experience. I've noticed them sit up taller in my car, exhale with relief and smile because they're proud of themselves. And if that's all they get from the experience, that's enough for me because what these moments reveal is that being brave wasn't as bad as they feared, and when it comes time to be brave again, they're a lot more likely to be game.

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