

Band-aids are Cheaper than Therapy

Why parents need to ease up, land the helicopter, and let their kids get hurt sometimes.

We've all heard the spiel a thousand times. "Back in my day", "You all needed a participation trophy", "Kids today are too soft". Since the moment we millennials became a parenting generation, we have been inundated with criticisms about the way we are raising our kids. Our parents are quick to let us know exactly all the ways we are screwing up our offspring, while shrugging off their own culpability towards the absolute disaster the world has become under their watch.

And I get it. We, collectively, as a generation of parents determined to break cycles of abuse and neglect, have found ourselves in uncharted waters. And we're floating here with no GPS, no map, no compass, not even a magic 8-ball for guidance. So it stands to reason that we are also going to make some mistakes, and those mistakes might have some long lasting consequences for our children, as well as ourselves.

One of those mistakes that I am personally very guilty of, is a reluctance to let my children experience consequences. Every time they take any action that I think is slightly dangerous, It's my first instinct to pull them back.

Somersaulting down a very small hill: What if they land wrong, and break an arm, or their neck?

Playing in the open backyard without me sitting on the back porch at all moments: What if they get abducted?

Running through the grass: What if they step on a bee, get stung, have an anaphylactic reaction that has thus far gone undetected, and we have a "My Girl" moment?

Now, there's a good chance that a lot of this is just plain old garden variety anxiety. But there's also more to it than that. We have become so determined to keep our kids safe from the dangers of the world, that we have forgotten that some dangers are necessary for our kids to learn to be independent and resilient. I would go so far as to say that some exposure to minor dangers is necessary for kids to learn action and consequences. I'll give personal examples.

My first child experience was an optimistic one. My partner and I did the new baby courses. We had a nursery full of the safest baby accessories we could find. They had a diet of clean, healthy foods. No alcohol, no caffeine, no seafood. We would take no chances with our child, an attitude that continued

after her birth. But toddlers will toddle, and you can't baby-proof physics, it turns out. Inevitably, she took a tumble outside, and got a pretty nasty bump. Not "hospital attention" nasty, but it was my firstborn baby girl, and it shook me up. After that, I became a hardcore helicopter parent, always trying to protect her from anything that could hurt her. She is a teenager now, and has a hypochondriac streak and a recurring therapy booking.

Now that my younger kids are in elementary school, I'm trying to get it right with them. I'm letting them play in the backyard whenever they want, and trusting that they will come back inside if they get hurt. Am I still taking precautions? Of course I am. Sunscreen is applied, water bottles are full, snacks are pre-prepared for easy access. I can't help but go to the backdoor every 5 minutes to check on them. Last week was every 3 minutes though, so progress is being made.

My partner and I discussed our own childhood a few days ago. We would spend entire days, from sunrise to sunset, without being in our parents sight. Days at the creek or community pool with friends, bike rides to neighboring towns for fun, hikes through the woods. We did all of these things without the use of cell phones, and our parents were confident in our survival. And with the exception of some skinned knees, bug bites, and the occasional twisted ankle, I always made it back unscathed.

Nobody can tell you that there are no dangers in the world. There are, and we see them on the news or socials every day. But turn off the fear mongers for a little bit, and you'll realize that while things can still happen, allowing your children the freedom and opportunity to scrape a knee will grant them confidence. You'll also discover that you can breathe a little more when they pick themselves up, dust themselves off, smile at you, and go somersaulting right back down that hill. And with all that extra space and time you have while they're out there figuring out how the world works, maybe you can drink a bottle of tea and write an essay.