

## Teaching Children Survival Skills

I often hear from my clients that growing up with modest means taught them the value of a dollar. Some clients are concerned that their children, having been raised in relative comfort, don't understand what it takes to earn enough to support their lifestyle. The vast majority of parents, even if not concerned about their children, express anxiety about the impact of wealth on their grandchildren as they grow up in comparative affluence. Without the life experience and knowledge of survival, honed by living with relatively moderate resources, parents question how well their children, and especially their grandchildren, will adapt and support themselves as they move into adulthood.

There is no one solution to this dilemma, yet there is a principle to consider: we master the art of living successfully and confidently by learning from our mistakes. Individuals who made their own way, and generated wealth, typically had life experiences along the way that toughened them up. They learned to survive. If we want our kids to develop that sort of resilience and spirit, we must allow them to stumble and fall every so often.

As a parent, especially one with substantial financial resources, your instinct might be to rush to the rescue when the going gets tough. There's a fine line between allowing a child to fall in a detrimental way and allowing a fall that builds character. If your child is making poor choices, you may want them to learn through living with the consequences, as life experience is such a great teacher. For example, if your child spends his or her entire monthly allowance in the first week of the month, letting him or her experience limits by not providing additional funds is a valuable teaching and learning opportunity. If your child crashes his or her car and doesn't have the funds to pay for repairs, assisting with contacting the insurance company while leaving him or her to find alternate transportation could be one way to find the course between appropriate support and encouraging self-responsibility.

It can be particularly challenging to assess circumstances where your child may be genuinely at risk. One extreme example might be if your child is likely to be incarcerated for possession of illegal drugs, with significant life-long consequences. Similarly, if you believe your child is about to be conned or taken advantage of, putting part or all of his or her inheritance at risk, you will have to weigh whether or not to step in. You will want to identify the valuable lessons your child needs to learn measured against all that is at stake. As a parent, you have the challenging task of determining whether or not your intervention will ultimately be in the best interests of your child.

If your role is as a grandparent, you have less ability to shape the life experiences of your grandchild and you also have to be respectful of your children's parenting styles. Dialogue with your children, to understand their perspective and offer yours, is a good starting point to weave the delicate threads of your involvement in the lives of your grandchildren.

Experiencing a fall can help limit undue entitlement, teach survival skills and build character. If that's what you want to do for your children and grandchildren, then choose, carefully, the circumstances when you will, and will not, come to their rescue. In the long run, this may be the best gift you can give them.