It can be difficult to see your children struggle. However, it’s important to allow children to experience the consequences of their actions. Enabling kids to solve problems on their own helps them grow into responsible individuals.
When shopping, the rage today is to choose “natural” products. This works in teaching children responsibility as well! Letting your child experience the natural consequences of his or her choices and behavior takes a lot of the burden off your shoulders and puts it back where it belongs – on the child.

It is so difficult to see our children face struggle, discomfort, inconvenience, disappointment, or embarrassment – so our first impulse is to jump in and rescue them. In “Parenting with Love and Logic,” Jim Fay calls this “helicopter parenting.” Parents Hoover around their children and swoop in to save them from any discomfort. Some examples of this include rushing their homework to school, insisting they wear a coat, chewing out the teacher who would dare to give the child a low grade or the coach who didn’t see the super-star your child will become. Children who throw a fit in a public place and get what they want, or teens who get a traffic ticket that is paid by mom are also examples of not allowing natural consequences to teach responsibility.

Even though we truly think we are doing what is best for our child, the lesson we are teaching them is “you are fragile and unable to handle difficult situations. You can’t make it without me”. Is this the message you want your child to hear?

Examples of how to let natural consequences teach the lesson may include: “Oh boy / oh man/ wow, I’ll bet that was embarrassing / upsetting / frustrating not to have your assignment, get that low grade, not start on the team, have to
appear in front of the judge, stay home etc. What are you going to do about it? / how are you going to handle it?” Letting a child be cold is difficult, but what a better way to teach thinking ahead and being prepared? “Wow I’ll bet that was uncomfortable being so cold. What are you going to do about it?” Let your child know you truly feel bad for what they are going through and then give it back to them to solve.

It is parents’ and sometimes even grandparents’ responsibility to prepare their youth to function in the real world.

It is great to let children suffer the natural consequences while they are young and the stakes are small to help them avoid making poor choices when the stakes are high. It is not easy – and you will be tempted to jump in and rescue – but you can resist. The more you do it, the more you will see the benefits of handing the problem back to the child. And watching kids learn from their own mistakes adds to the joy of parenting.

This article was written by GaeLynn Peterson. Gaelynn is a long-time resident of Wayne County where she serves the residents as Utah State University faculty with an emphasis in FCS and 4-H. She has an M.S. in Psychology and has worked with at-risk students before joining the USU family. As a mother of seven and grandmother of 28, she has had a lot of experience working with youth, and she loves it! She enjoys traveling, camping, Lake Powell, and any beach.
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