



Several years ago, I found myself sitting in the waiting room of a therapist's office with my heavy-hearted middle-school child. I couldn't figure out how we got here. **My husband and I were focused on forming a faith-filled family, and raising strong, healthy, happy children. We believed by raising our children in the Faith and loving them unconditionally, they would be protected from unhappiness and wounds.** Perhaps we were naïve.

We watched with confusion and alarm as we saw our 13-year-old daughter crumble before us in seventh grade; the light faded from her once bright eyes, in spite of our prayers and God's promises. The pressures of social drama and academics were heavy. Our child stopped seeing herself for who she was and instead internalized things other people said about her. She thought she didn't measure up to other's expectations and began to believe this was the core of her identity.

Somehow these things spoke louder than the message we had been trying to build in her for 13 years – a message of love and worth as a child of God. We thought we could raise happy, successful children and protect them from wounds of the world by the sheer force of faith and love.

I felt like a failure as a parent, but I had to put those emotions aside, **trust God and walk into this darkness I never imagined facing. It takes humility, and a willingness to carry pain you can't fix, to walk through suffering with your child. The word compassion comes from Latin, meaning "to suffer with."** We lived compassion. And my husband and I had to live it quietly because this battle was not meant for the public. By the grace of God, we found a great Christian therapist our child connected with and had the courage to open up to. Step by step, we saw her walk through this struggle

and find her smile again.

Meanwhile, I turned to God for support. I had a paradigm shift after speaking with a priest about the terrifying new landscape before me. I was grieving the fact that I hadn't been able to protect my daughter from the pain she was going through. After listening, he quietly said, "Kerrie, would you prevent your child from having the experience of Mercy?" This was it for me. I didn't need to go farther than my Rosary and Bible to see the trauma that Jesus suffered in his passion and death, as a refugee child fleeing to Egypt with Mary and Joseph, when he was left behind in Jerusalem for three days, and when St. Joseph died. I saw Mary's trauma as well. She was threatened with divorce, had no place to give birth, fled to Egypt in the middle of the night, and ultimately had a sword pierce her heart.

After many, many days of prayer, I came to realize that our faith does not make perfect people, it makes strong people, healed people. Healed people experience difficulty, trauma, sin, weakness, and failure, and become strong through the experience of mercy. They become something stronger than successful, they become resilient.

Years later our daughter still has battles, but with a strength and maturity born from the struggle, a struggle we would have done anything possible to protect her from. **Indeed, all things do work for good in those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28). If I had been successful in shielding my child from challenges, difficulties, and failures, I would have taken away her chance to develop resiliency and experience the mercy of the Father.**

My parenting goals have shifted. Instead of trying to protect my children, I focus on raising resilient children who, God-willing, will become resilient faith-filled adults.

Here are six lessons I've learned. I share them with you not as a therapist, but as a mother who hopes to encourage you on your parenting journey.

"There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in."

Lesson 1. Don't shield your children from all challenges and failures. It's more loving to let them learn to navigate challenges as children and teenagers, while we are walking by their side, than to have the big brick wall of reality hit them for the first time during their adult life.

Lesson 2. Be a safe place. Teenagers may blame you, spew unkind words and roll their eyes at you. Paradoxically, it may be because they know how much you love them, and because they trust you. In a difficult world, you, their family, may be the only place they feel safe enough to let it all out. Stay calm, help them process their feelings. Don't take it personally. Do not accept disrespectful behavior, but don't let it ignite your emotions. Tell them when a behavior is unacceptable and calmly give them consequences for their actions.

Lesson 3. Teach them to reframe. Reframing involves recognizing negative thoughts, analyzing them, and seeing reality through a different, more positive frame or lens.

Lesson 4. Model brave love that isn't striving to "be the best" but to "give your best." Resilient people are not crushed by failures, rejections, wounds, and traumas, but know that God heals and builds love through adversity. Resilient people are less afraid of being hurt and freer to love others no matter the circumstances. Praise kids for how they are loving others and themselves, rather than for the results of their efforts, which are not often in their control.

Lesson 5. Speak the hope that you have in faith. As parents, model selfless love that has an abiding peace, even in the face of pain and difficulty. Be honest about challenges but recognize and articulate the good in the situation. If the circumstances are so dark that you can't see the good, recognize and verbalize to your children that it will come, and that sometimes we have to walk through darkness before we see the light.

Lesson 6. Teach kids they are worth more than what they achieve. The pressure to

succeed socially, academically and athletically is enormous. Instinctively, we want to protect our children from adversity and failure. Stop. Let them face dragons. Let them fail. But be there beside them. As parents, we need our kids to see we value who they are more than what they achieve and that they can come up with solutions to problems on their own. Show this by praising their efforts and character instead of just their accomplishments.

Resilient people are positive and optimistic. In an angry, broken world, resilient people live with a clear view of reality, but also with compassion, mercy, and hope. They look for solutions. Their optimism gives them the energy to do the hard work needed to make it through something difficult, or to help someone else through challenges. **Some kids are naturally optimistic. Encourage this. Some kids aren't. Accept this and help them develop the skills needed to build their hope and optimism.** Help them learn to look for the good in any situation and keep that as their focus. If they can't find a good, help them think of a good they can create and encourage them to work on that, as St. John of the Cross said, "Where there is no love, put love, and you will find love."

Yes, they may fail. And if they do it will be ok. Recently my 5th-grade son came home from school talking about a principle they were working on in the classroom. It's this, "FAIL means First Attempt In Learning." I love that. Maybe I should go back to 5th grade...

Spiritual Resources

Pray a lot. Pray, let God guide you and let him guide your child. Sit in his arms and let Him love you through this. Ask for the gift of trust, and lay this burden at his feet. It's for him to heal, not for you to carry and try to control. Here are a few spiritual resources that help me with this.

1. Mary Un-doer of Knots: I put my children and their challenges in her hands.
2. All things work for good in those that love the Lord (Romans 8:28)
3. This illness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God. (John 11:4)
4. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Phil4:13)
5. Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is

God's will in Christ Jesus that you do this. (1 Thes 5:16-18)

6. Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you are involved in various trials because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But you must let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing (James 1: 2-4)

7. The Guardian Angel Prayer- pray it for your kids. "Angel of God, her guardian dear, to whom God's love commits thee near, ever this day, be at her side, to light and guard, to rule and guide."