



USEP-OHIO PARENT TIP: Let Optimism Rule!

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“I can’t do it! Only the big kids will make the team!” “I just never make good grades. I’m no good at taking tests.” “Things are so different now, it’s not safe anywhere anymore!” “These young parents just don’t care. What’s the matter with the world?!” “The money is never there in the budget for *any* of the really important things.”

We all do it. We all sometimes say these things. And our children mimic the pessimism that reigns in the media, in our homes, and even in the culture of some school settings.

Last week I took pictures of three wisteria blossoms in my yard. I planted the wisteria six years ago. The book said they could take up to five years to bloom. I had almost given up! What a kick to look out one day and see the three blossoms. It encouraged me and offered new motivation, new energy, a sense of gratitude and a lot of joy.

Research shows that children who experience a series of major stresses like poverty, divorce, loss of a parent, or major illness are resilient and able to bounce back successfully if they are optimistic thinkers. They still see the world as a pretty good place, and consider themselves able to have success and joy. They feel competence and have positive expectations of life ahead. The optimists seem resilient and feel less stress and depression, even when bad things happen.

Optimism and a positive outlook means we must believe that inside ourselves we have the strength and talent to accomplish things; and that outside ourselves we are cared for by our parents, caring people and God or a spiritual presence who will not abandon us!

Optimists have the power of capability to believe that they can pass a test

even if they do not excel; learn to play an instrument even if it takes a lot of tedious practice; have friends even if they are occasionally betrayed; and see setbacks as temporary. They try again another way!

Parents and teachers can teach and encourage by giving examples, by telling their stories.

Empathize by letting kids know that life is hard and disappointing, but progress is what counts. Don't say, "Cheer up, you have a bad attitude", or simply "You can do it". Do listen first, then show understanding, and tell stories about overcoming hard things. Setbacks are temporary. There is always another way to solve a problem.

Teach with words and actions. John showed his grandkids frustration when he took out a kitchen wall only to learn that there was a big vent that stood in the way. He had to remove the cabinets twice, reroute the vent and start over. But perseverance worked, and the renovation project turned out great – eventually!

Encourage. Mr. Johnson realized that his middle school choir members were reluctant to perform, because they did not win an award like the choir from last year. He encouraged them to see that they can improve skills by being persistent and working hard. "You sound better each week! Feel proud!"

Optimism is learned, but so is pessimism. Good parents and teachers believe in the power of optimism.

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