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BUILDING RESILIENCE

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans
for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.
Jeremiah 29:11

As parents, we wish there would never be a reason for our children to have to be resilient - no bumps and bruises to body, mind, or spirit. But we live in a world that teaches us otherwise. Our children, despite our best efforts to protect and insulate them, will be hurt. They will endure physical pain and injury. Their hearts will be hurt, both intentionally and unintentionally. Their dreams will be dashed. Friends and family, teachers and bosses will disappoint. And, they may experience terrible losses.

Of course, we will not knowingly put our child in harms way and we will strive to protect that child from the life-altering scars. We will create safe boundaries. We will work for a world that is safer for all of God's children.

Parents have a gift far better than the dream of insulating their child from life's hard knocks. We can help them build resilience - skills and strategies to endure the slings and arrows that life will throw at them, to view setbacks as a opportunity to take a new and potentially better road, to be able to journey with others through their challenges, to encourage others during their dark times, and to know and claim their own strength and resilience.

How will we do this?

- LISTEN to your child, so that you hear and understand whatever is causing pain. Ask open questions, like "Tell me more," then, listen some more.
- EMPATHIZE, acknowledging that this is hard and painful and that you ache with your child. Share a story from your experience, but keep it short and don't try to trump your child's story.
- OBSERVE what your child seems to be feeling. Then, help them find words to describe the feeling. Giving them words to express their feelings is empowering.
- REMIND your child of a time that he went through a challenging situation and emerged stronger ... and, yes, resilient! "I remember a time when you ..." and tell the story.
- BRAINSTORM ideas your child could use to address and resolve the situation. Let your child generate the first and most of the ideas. You be the scribe and write them down. When they have five or more ideas, simply ask "How do you suppose that

would work out?” about each one. “Which idea will you choose to try first?” “When will you do that?” “After you are done, let’s talk about how it worked out.” As the parent, you can steer your child from the ideas that do not reflect the values your family embraces.

- PREDICT a bright, healed, joyous, successful future ... with hope! Remind your child that God created her, loves her, and is with her every step of the way.
- ENCOURAGE your child by believing, really believing in him and expressing your confidence. “I know that this is really hard and I KNOW that you can do it. What support do you need from me?”
- MODEL GRACE AND FORGIVENESS in your life and catch your child doing the same.

What are some of the things to avoid? Please DON'T

- DECLARE IT A CATASTROPHE by letting your child believe that this is the worst thing in the world that could have befallen them or any other human being. Help your child keep it in perspective.
- MINIMIZE by declaring this really is just a little thing, of no consequence. “I can’t believe you even take this seriously!”
- COMPETE by having a Betty Crocker Suffer Off. “You think that’s bad? Do you know what happened to me?”
- INSULATE by letting your child experience no consequences for misbehavior. “Oh, we’ll pay for that broken window at our neighbors’ house. Don’t worry about it. Things like that happen. I’ve never really liked Mrs. Jones, anyway.”
- LIE for your child, when you know that your child did something wrong, by creating a false alibi or saying, “My child would never say something like that. The other boy must just be trying to get my child in trouble.”
- USE A DEMEANING NAME to label your child. Your child is not mean or selfish or bad. Separate your child’s personhood - a beloved and forgiven child of God - from their behavior. “Your behavior was unkind and not worthy of the kind person I know you to be. How will you repair this relationship? What could you do next time?”
- SHAME your child by demanding, “How could you be so stupid?” “What were you thinking of?” “How many times do I have to tell you?”

Take it all to God in prayer. God is the one who created and loved your child first. God built human beings to be resilient. That is one of the things it means to be made in God’s image. Celebrate your child’s capacity for and examples of resilience!