

As parents, are you equipping your youth to cope with adversity, or are you seeking ways to reduce the adversity. Is your child strong enough to face tough times? Everyday life is finding our children becoming more and more stressed which leads to mental health problems including anxiety and depression.

In a 2018 survey analysis from the National Survey of Mental Health, findings revealed that rates of anxiety and depression had increased in kids ages 6 to 17 from 5.4% in 2003 to 8.4% in 2011-12. (American Psychological Association) But what is creating this stress among our youth?

Pressure from teachers to score high on standardized tests, securing a position on the varsity sports team, an overwhelming schedule filled with practices for school sports and activities, community sports and travel sports involvement, church, gymnastics, karate, piano and even 4-H and other community organizations -- all of these “responsibilities” could easily stress anyone in trying to meet all of the demands. So how are some parents handling everything expected from their children in order to ensure that they succeed? Some parents feel the need to simply take on some of their children’s responsibility and do the work for them.

Dr. Tim Elmore, founder of Growing Leaders, has witnessed parents doing homework for their children and staying up all night to create a science project for their child in order to impress the judges. Some parents hand over money whenever asked by their children without requiring any accountability for completed chores or family responsibilities. Parents are making the assumption that their children are “maxed out” and simply don’t have the grit or resilience to handle life’s pressures. So, parents choose to do the work for their children in order to ‘help’ them with their anxiety and stress. But this type of assistance from parents and others actually stunts the development of the child.

Doing the work for your child is not a long term solution and does not prepare them for the life that awaits them. If a pattern of completing work for youth in order to remove stressful situations continues over a period of time, neural pathways are changed and expectations condition the child to always need others to do tasks for them. They then begin to feel entitled in having others complete their tasks resulting at an adult age with no coping skills to handle hard work. We all want our children to succeed, but at what cost?

As parents, what steps can be taken to ensure that our children have grit and resilience and can cope with everyday stress and demands? Check out and implement the following nine steps that Dr. Tim Elmore recommends:

- **Begin with belief.** Kids have far more potential than they see. Let them know you believe in their capabilities.
- **Help them say “no.”** Allow your child to not become overcommitted with too many options and teach them to prioritize.
- **Give them regular chores.** Work helps build grit! Stanford Dean Julie Lythcott-Haims says, “If kids aren’t doing the dishes, it means someone else is doing that for them.”
- **Maintain high expectations.** Continue with expectations and keep high standards for your youth. If these are reduced, this might send a message of disbelief to your children.
- **Model social skills.** Parents can help their youth maintain perspective on a busy schedule by talking over the “to-do list” with level emotions.
- **Value effort over avoiding failure.** Foster a growth mindset verses a fixed mindset. Encourage the effort over grades or scores. Effort is in their control; outcomes often aren’t.

- **Help them limit their social media use.** Less than two hours on social media per day means kids are less vulnerable to anxiety. Over two hours leads to anxiety!
- **Ask them how you can support them.** Find ways to support your youth without doing the work for them. Encouragement, snacks, tutors, etc. are ways to help in a healthy way.
- **Remind them of the big picture.** Youth often get lost and overwhelmed in the here and now. Grit and resilience goes up when reminded of long-term goals and the bigger future picture.

Dr. Elmore speaks of one of his leadership team member's family and their 18-month-old son. This toddler is already completing age-appropriate chores around the house by disposing of his diaper, wiping down his place setting after a meal and closing the dishwasher door and pressing the start button. These simple 'chores' allow their son to grow up knowing he is a part of a family and each member of the family has work to do to help each other.

Allow your children to build grit and resilience through encouragement, support and making choices to help avoid stress, anxiety and depression. Don't do the work for them!

This article is adapted from Dr. Tim Elmore, CEO and founder of Growing Leaders, an international non-profit organization created to develop leadership and life skills in the emerging generations.

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