

Ask Dr. Jim...

“What do children need as they return to school life?”...an interesting question and one that we do not think enough about ahead of time...we tend to react in our lives rather than look ahead to the uncertainties we must face.

For me, the easy answer is a straightforward one. We all need predictability, security of routines and ability to adapt or show flexibility when faced with unexpected events. In short, make things safe and secure such as bedtimes, chores, time for homework (even if it is practice of reading), a family time (games night, social activity, visiting with friends) and limit “screen time”.

But as well, we must teach our children that there are adventures ahead that will mean we must develop skills/strategies to problem solve situations that we do not necessarily expect or want. I used to say that life is an uphill walk and we must put effort into this walk if we are to move ahead and truly experience what life can hold for each of us. I now say that we must expect that there will be obstacles we must deal with in order to deal with life but also to learn how to be resilient.

Resiliency equates to successful problem solving (sometimes after many unsuccessful attempts) and this is a skill which fortunately becomes stronger as we practice it. I think of sayings such as, “Try, try, try again, don’t give up!” that my mother used to say. I think of the book, “The Little Engine That Could.”

I greatly dislike it when we allow our children to simply turn a problem over to adults as this promotes being a victim in my opinion. We need to practice self sufficiency and independence, not dependency. Of course as a parent we want our children to succeed and it is easy to see “failure” as a bad thing for our children. Failure that is resolved through effort (and yes, we can make suggestions!) leads to resilient, independent thinkers that will find value in their lives and share this with their own children when the time comes.