

### First Drill Sergeant

Sooner or later all children have a teacher who is an “all business,” “no nonsense,” “drill sergeant” kind of a teacher. Might be third or fourth grade, if not then it will be no later than Middle School. And depending on how the *parents* react, it will either be growth promoting or hurtful.

Children get used to a certain kind of teacher in the earliest grades. This makes sense: People who are called to teach pre-school through second or third grade are often quite patient and forgiving, with a calm and gentle presence. Inevitably, a parent will welcome home an upset, distressed child, telling a tale of a “mean” teacher who “yelled at all of us.”

Growth promoting or hurtful? Depends on how the parent reacts. Notice that it is not the teacher we are concerned about. Teachers are allowed to use stern voices and not give five warnings and three reminders. It is good for our children to have all kinds of teachers in elementary school. How else will they be ready for the broad range of teaching styles waiting for them in high school and college?

Imagine two very different welcomes. A child comes home upset and the parent gets upset also. “How could this happen to my baby?” “This is not acceptable.” Sits down right then and emails the teacher. Puts a call in to the principal. Asks the child question after question about what happened.

Now a different type of welcome. Child comes home and tells mother about what happened. The mother is still warm and supportive, but instead of conveying the idea that what happened is a terrible thing, works hard to convey that what happened is an acceptable part of life. Teachers are responsible for maintaining an environment conducive to learning. It is a big job, an important job, and sometimes children need to be reprimanded. Parents support teachers. Even if there is a reason

to check something out, it is done privately, so that the child doesn't learn to play parent against teacher.

One of the most important lessons for children to learn is that the world wasn't created for their comfort. Things happen that they wish had not happened. Right there, right then, is a fork in the road. One path has something of a "helpless victim" feel to it. The other path has more of an accepting "oh well, I'll get through this" feel to it.

The "first drill sergeant" teacher provides parents with a perfect opportunity to teach our children how to accept, deal with and get over some unwanted event. Rather than teaching (inadvertently) that they should always be comfortable, use this as a chance to teach that they are going to have all kinds of teachers and it is their responsibility to adjust. What a great lesson! By our wisdom to frame the event as acceptable, even if unwanted, we can begin to teach our children how to develop inner strength, resilience and the skills to push through other unwanted events. Friends will move away, a friend's parents may divorce, grandma may require a hospitalization.

The development of inner strength and resilience requires uncomfortable times. In fact, some of the least resilient high school students I have met had very comfortable childhoods. They missed the needed practice opportunities that could have been provided by unwanted events and uncomfortable times.

So, the next time your children come home with upset feelings, try to teach an attitude of acceptance and calm confidence in the presence of this stress. In time, you and your children may look back on the strict teacher, or the birthday party invitation that didn't come, as important, life-changing events that propelled them to a certain wisdom about life. It is from such times that our children learn how to get through difficult times.