

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My wife always wants to “equalize” the outcome or rewards with our children (ages 5 and 7). When one accomplishes something or has something good happen, she wants to make certain the other doesn't feel bad, so she comes up with a way to balance the circumstances. I know she means well, but I don't think it's a good idea. We seem to have reached an impasse. Help!

ANSWER: She does “mean well.” I imagine that both of you really want what is best for your kids. Mothers are *generally* better at reading their children's emotions, helping them with relational situations, and nurturing. I would suspect that her decision to equalize certain aspects of life for her children emerges from her desire to nurture, pacify, and maintain relationships. These are good goals! However, they are not the only goals, nor are they better goals than what fathers have to offer.

Fathers are *generally* better at looking toward the future, understanding life's battles, and instilling survival skills. I would suspect that your conclusion that your wife's methods are not a “good idea” comes from your perception that life is not fair, that living is hard, and disappointments are many. You wish to prepare your kids well, so they are not overwhelmed. That too is a good goal!

Moms and Dads prioritize life skills differently and teach them differently. They love in different ways. That's why a child needs both parents. **Both** parents have wonderful lessons, experiences and perspectives to bestow upon their children. Each parent was created and designed to complement the other (GEN. 2:18). Fathers should generally embody the strong aspects of love: accountability, firmness, and responsibility. (Yes, dad. You should be the “bad guy.”) Mothers should generally embody the soft aspects of love: nurture, empathy, and compassion. Note that God handles us using **both** aspects of love.

One of the dangers of much of today's educational and family experiences is the lack of congruence with later reality. When everyone gets a ribbon, when true competition is stifled, and when situations and outcomes are adjusted so no feelings are hurt and everyone is happy; children falsely conclude that life is fair, somehow everyone wins, and that no one is smarter or more capable than anyone else. When children get too many chances, when there are

always reminders, and when standards are too often compromised; children falsely conclude that there is no real accountability, they don't have to be responsible, and that they can don't have to bother doing their best. Thus, they are often ill prepared for employment, marriage and parenthood, not to mention the difficulties of life.

Before Mom gets too upset... of course there are times when everyone needs to win, when competition is forsaken so there is cooperation, and when outcomes are adjusted in the name of love. Mothers have a God-given ability to recognize these moments and effect change. Grace is the great "equalizer" of all people; it enables everyone who believes the Gospel to "win" eternally. God continues to "adjust" his relationship with us by His incomprehensible forgiveness. In this world, however, children must have a taste of real life (life in a fallen world) so they can be strong enough to survive—spiritually, physically and emotionally. Fathers have a God-given ability to recognize these moments and effect change. I believe most fathers are more aware of the "fallen nature" of life than mothers. Generally, women have more optimism about life and relationships; men have more resignation and fear.

Together with your wife, pray about, watch for, and talk about how you will give your children opportunities to experience and determine how they want life to be verses how life is. As your children grow older (your children are still young), you both should allow and place more and more of the "weight" of life on their shoulders. Your job should systematically transform from fixer, protector and nurturer to ally, companion and confidant. Loving our children in the best of ways, means **gradually** exposing them to life's realities.

As parents, we do so want to spare our children the pains of life. We were not made for pain; we were made for Eden. We long for the Garden, but the Garden is no more. We long for Heaven, but Heaven is not yet. While we are "in-between", we must equip our children to endure with both strength and hope, as "salt and light", with "innocence and shrewdness", as "in the world, but not of the world." Mom, let dad offer his treasure. When combined with yours, imagine how rich your children will be!

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