

Parenting *ideas*

INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

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Teach your kids to SHRUG!

The secret to having resilient, confident and optimistic children is to teach your kids to shrug!

It was so irritating, yet so effective.

I'm talking about my boyhood mate Terry's habit of *shrugging his shoulders* whenever anyone teased him or tried to persuade him to their way of thinking.

'Hey Terry, you're a ***&&&E@!*'

Shrug.

'Hey Terry, everyone says your.....**&&TR!*'

Shrug.

'Hey Terry, I'm going to tell on you!'

Shrug.

His nonchalance used to drive everyone nuts!

So much so that he was rarely targeted for teasing despite the fact that he wasn't sporty, he wasn't cool and he was late maturing – all of which back then, as now, would put a boy in the 'to be picked on' category.

I thought of Terry recently when I was coaching a young person about how to respond to some schoolyard taunts.

This young person wore his heart on his sleeve, taking taunts and even witticisms too seriously for his own good. Unfortunately, some of his so-called mates used to enjoy seeing him become angry.

The best way to break this *toxic cycle of taunt-react-taunt* was for him to change his reaction.

So we did some coaching in the art of shrugging and before long my young charge was shrugging his shoulders, as if to say 'Whatever', and walking away at the first sign of a taunt.

Eventually he was channelling Terry so well that his nonchalance even began to irritate me.

Some things can't be ignored

Don't get me wrong. Kids cannot and should not ignore all negative comments directed at them.

There are times when they need to stand up and be counted. They don't need to be aggressive about it, but they do need to be assertive from time to time. Sticking up for a friend, rescuing someone who is being taunted or even looking out for a sibling's best interests at school are times when children need to assert themselves rather than shrugging off a problem.

Kids practise on their siblings

Socially savvy kids know that some of the negative peer comments directed at them need to be ignored. However, this is quite a skill.

Ignoring comments and choosing your arguments is something many kids learn in their battles with siblings.

Those noisy sibling skirmishes that annoy the hell out of parents actually toughen kids up for the less-than-pleasant social interactions that take place in the schoolyard.

Interestingly, my boyhood mate Terry was the youngest of four brothers. I guess he would have perfected the art of shrugging out of sheer necessity.

So, if you have a sensitive child who wears his or her heart on their sleeve, or a child who reacts impulsively to both taunts and witticisms alike, you may wish to introduce the *art of shrugging* into their repertoire of responses.

How to create a good shrug

Kids can practise shrugging in front of the mirror so that they can see what a good shrug looks like. There are 4 ingredients:

- 1 A 'whatever' look.
- 2 A shrug of the shoulders.
- 3 A simple, non-combative, non-sarcastic line such as 'You may be right', 'Whatever' or 'I hadn't thought of that'.
- 4 A final breaking of eye contact that indicates that they are in control.

A word of warning

If you teach your kids to shrug, you need to be prepared for them to use this shrugging technique against you when you direct some criticism or constructive feedback their way. If they do, you'll find out how damn infuriating nonchalance (even when it's fake) can be.

Oh, and you'll be seeing a child or young person who is exercising a degree of personal power that, when used smartly, will increase their overall social effectiveness.



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