

Embracing the “Second Choice”

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One of the most important skills that children need to become happy is appropriate ways to deal with disappointments. Do these scenes look familiar?

- I want the blue one! Red is a yucky color!
- I want it now! I’m not waiting until next week!
- Why does he get one and I don’t? That’s not fair!

Let’s be perfectly honest about this – life is truly a series of disappointments. How we adapt determines how happy we will be in life. From children’s perspectives, they are disappointed about: losing a game, not being first in line, wearing uncomfortable clothes, being forced to eat certain foods, and not getting the lead in the school play. As adults, we hit more brick walls: not getting the job or promotion we want, discovering a spouse is cheating, being turned down for a car or home loan, and watching our bodies age no matter how hard we fight it.

If we develop our adaptability skills, we can roll with life’s punches and stay on the sunny side. I learned to do this in the middle of one of my life’s biggest disappointments. I credit RESOLVE National Infertility Association (www.resolve.org) for this revelation more than 20 years ago.

At the time, I believed I couldn’t ever be happy again if I didn’t have a baby. I gradually learned to acknowledge how much I yearned for a baby and recognized that was my “first choice” (motherhood). Then I began to look into what could be my second or third choices. I chose to be happy with my second choice which was going back to school. (Ironically, I found out I was pregnant on my first day of classes, when I was truly at peace and happy with my second choice. I think God has a real sense of humor!)

This is an important skill to teach our children – surely they will need it as they mature and face the really big disappointments in life. We need to teach our children that their circumstances do NOT determine their happiness. We all know about people who have “everything” and are miserable and others who have “nothing” but manage to maintain peaceful and joyful attitudes. Those who are happy are the people who accept the losses and disappointments as opportunities to stretch their imaginations to find other ways to meet their needs and to learn and grow. Try using the “second choice” skill next time your child wants the blue one but there are only red ones left. Acknowledge that blue is her first choice favorite. You can even tell her you wish you had magic powers to turn everything blue as you understand how much you love the color blue! Then ask if she’d like the red one as her second choice – or would she prefer to do without? “Embracing the second choice” skill builds upon the “accepting all feelings” skill as well as enabling children to have some power in their lives by making choices.

Disappointment doesn’t have to be a dead end. It can be an opportunity to find out that your second choice could be a better one for you. Go ahead and try it yourself: “Embrace Your Second Choice.”

If your child has a hard time dealing with disappointment – acting out, disturbing the peace, and being confrontational - please call CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services to inquire about Family Action Counseling and/or Interface Youth Shelter. (352) 244-0628 x3822 or (352) 244-0618. www.cdsfl.org