

# Prepare the Child for the Road, Not the Road for the Child

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Years ago, my friend's daughter really wanted to be chosen as "Swimmer of the Week" at their country club. It's an honor bestowed weekly to one child per age group in the summer.

Parents will sometimes call the club to request that their child be picked. But my friend didn't want to do that. She wanted her daughter to win the award through hard work and perseverance. So she told her child, "When you get this award, you'll know you earned it. You'll know I didn't have anything to do with it."

It took her daughter TWO SUMMERS to be named "Swimmer of the Week." As you'd imagine, she was so proud of herself when her efforts finally paid off. But the biggest surprise came at the summer's end, when her daughter received the Coach's Award at the banquet. This award is based on hard work, attitude, and performance.

To this day, this child still gets recognized for her work ethic by teachers and coaches. She receives honors like "hardest worker award" and team captain. And while I'm sure her work ethic is partly due to nature, I'm also certain that her nurturing at home has played a big role, too.

My favorite parenting motto has always been, "Prepare the child for the road, not the road for the child." The most popular article I've written - ["10 Common Mistakes Parents Today Make"](#) - was based on this philosophy, and given the response it received, I believe many parents embrace a similar perspective.

Yet even so, it's hard not to be a Snowplow Parent in an age of Snowplow Parenting. It's hard not to clear every obstacle in our children's path so they can be happy *now* - getting what they want, when they want it - and buck the current trends.

But when we clear the road for a child, we make their life too easy. We don't allow them to build life-coping skills they'll need down the road to handle life's hard realities. Because right now our kids face Little League stress. They face rejection, disappointment, and adversity on a small and age-appropriate level (generally speaking).

But one day, our kids will experience Big League stress. Their rejection, disappointment, and adversity will be adult-sized. And unless they learn healthy ways to cope with Little League stress - and experience the pride and confidence that come when they push through an obstacle and emerge stronger on the other side - they won't be ready for the Big League.

It's hard to admit this, but part of a parent's job is to help our kids not need us. We have 18 years to pack their suitcase, 18 years to slowly equip them to handle life as self-sufficient adults. And while love is *irrefutably* the most important gift we give our kids, true love wants what's best for a person long-term. True love thinks beyond instant gratification and short-lived happiness. It values *character* over trophies and *commitment* over quick fixes.

There's a reason for the [mental health crisis counselors are seeing on college campuses](#), where outwardly successful students are miserable inside because they can't cope with normal life challenges. There's a reason why psychologists are seeing a record number of 20-somethings who are depressed and don't know why, because they claim they had

magical childhoods, their parents are their best friends, and they never experienced tragedy or anything more than normal disappointments.

It's largely due to the fact that we live in an age where we overindulge our kids. We concentrate so hard on creating magical memories and removing obstacles to keep our kids happy that we often fail to cultivate qualities like character, perseverance, patience, determination and resolve that they'll need to be happy, successful adults.

The kids I most like to watch grow up aren't always in the spotlight. Personally, I favor the underdogs, those kids who work harder than their peers because they have to and stay motivated when nobody's watching or cheering them on. Because these kids are building resiliency. They're driven by intrinsic factors. They're learning early that the best way to deal with a brick wall is to find ways to scale it, rather than expecting someone to take it away.

I admire my friend for letting her daughter wait two summers to earn "Swimmer of the Week" when the shortcut of a phone call was available. And I guarantee the pride her daughter feels when she sees that trophy - a symbol of her sweat and tears - is vastly different than the ambivalence she'd have toward a trophy her mom once helped her secure.

Because it's not trophies that build a child's self-esteem, but rather *the stories behind those trophies*. When a child leaves home at age 18, their trophies stay in their bedroom. The stories of how those trophies were earned, however, travel in their suitcase.

Preparing the child for the road means packing their suitcase with care. So as I pack my kids' suitcases with love, faith, and affection, I try to save room for resiliency and character - both acquired by facing

obstacles and disappointments. I try to remember that every suitcase needs a healthy mix of warm memories and real-life lessons.

Whatever ends up in my kids' suitcases, I hope they carry them with pride. I hope their suitcases represent both the security of home and the security of knowing they can handle hard things.

Most of all, I hope I can love my kids enough to not make their life too easy. It's a tall order for any parent whose heart breaks whenever their child is unhappy, but one we must all work toward if we want our kids to reach their full potential as healthy and well-adjusted adults.

*This post originally appeared on [karikampakis.com](http://karikampakis.com). Find Kari on [Facebook](#) or check out her book for teen & tween girls, [10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know](#), released by Thomas Nelson.*

