

Empowering Independence



By Holly Novick, Head of School

Let's face it, adults. The world our children are growing up in is a lot different than the world of our childhood. Much of it is better, safer and more connected. Frankly, it's a lot more interesting. But on the flip side of that progress is information overload. We can become overwhelmed by choice in today's modern world, and so can our children, so we make the logical choice of managing that input as best we can: limit screens, provide routines, carefully guide their access to the wide open world and all of its fascinating, but sometimes bewildering, options. We are their home, their shield, their safe space to escape the information hurricane that is modern life.

It only makes sense. After all, they are only three, or eight, or thirteen, or sixteen - they are growing daily toward adulthood, but they aren't adults yet. They need help navigating the world, and fortunately we have more tools, more resources and more means to help them than any parent ever has before.

How to give kids the gifts they need to become resilient adults.

We can protect, and provide them with an idyllic world where all is ordered, regimented and digestible.

But wait - is that what life is really like? Is that real freedom? Does that reflect our adult experience?

No.

At some point along our well-intentioned way, many of us may have become a little too overenthusiastic in our zeal to shelter.

We may be running the risk of sealing our children into a "healthy" cocoon so tightly that the "real world" may be a rude awakening when they finally encounter it.

In *How to Raise an Adult*, Julie Lythcott-Haims calls this something we have likely heard before: helicopter parenting. Hovering, providing everything a child needs, with the unintended consequence of knocking them flat when we lift off to deliver them to adult life. We stick around in those first days of kindergarten, just in case they might need us. We deliver fresh, hot lunches to school, to ensure they are well fed and feel cared for. We rush the left-behind project to campus in the nick of time, so they feel accomplished and successful.

Sometimes, by doing things for them, we send the unintended, but all too clear message that they can't do it by themselves. What they need to know is that they CAN.

At The Country School, we realize, just like you do at home, that kids need boundaries. They need to know the edges of their safe space, but that space needs to be big enough to let them fall down sometimes, to let them get into disagreements with friends, to let them fail and learn the value of it. Maybe your young child is a little uncertain being in a new environment. When you show him you are confident leaving him in the safe and nurturing hands of his teachers, you're showing him that you know he CAN make new friends and learn important things. When you expect your child to prepare her own lunch for school, you are giving her the gift of knowing she CAN help take care of her own needs.





And when you let your middle schooler miss an assignment deadline, you're helping him learn two things: weathering disappointment and that he CAN get it right next time.

Part of our "emPATHy" this year is an intentional focus on those boundaries, and the room for mistakes within them. We ask you to join with us as we help students learn that grit, that ability to stay standing when the world wants to knock you down, comes through regular encounters with adversity.

**We ask you to be brave, and
vow to do the following:**

- When your child forgets his lunch at home, don't bring it to school.
- When your child doesn't finish her project on time, don't do it for her.
- When your child can't find their team uniform in their backpack, don't bring it to them.

In return, we vow that:

- We will make sure no one goes hungry.
- We will help students learn from academic missteps.
- We will allow athletes to return to practice after they miss.

There is a tremendous amount of research re-enforcing the value of learning from failure and how to cultivate resilience. We hope you will explore these resources and join with us in giving your child the gift of being able to say "I CAN Do It!"



EMPOWERMENT RESOURCES

"How to Raise an Adult " , Julie Lythcott-Haims

<https://tinyurl.com/yxns5247>

Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience.

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

<https://tinyurl.com/y3onh3q5>

"Maximizing Childrens Resilience." *Kirsten Weir, American Psychological Association*

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/09/cover-resilience>

"Protecting Your Kids from Failure Isn't Helpful: Here's How to Build Their Resilience."

Mandie Shean, The Conversation

<https://tinyurl.com/y6k3vdee>

"How to Help Kids Learn to Fail: Only Through Trial and Error Can Children Become Resilient Adults."

Beth Arky, Child Mind Institute

<https://tinyurl.com/y68eent7>

"The Resilient Child: Can Your Child Bounce Back from Failure?"

Maureen Healy, Psychology Today

<https://tinyurl.com/yyc6gdk>