



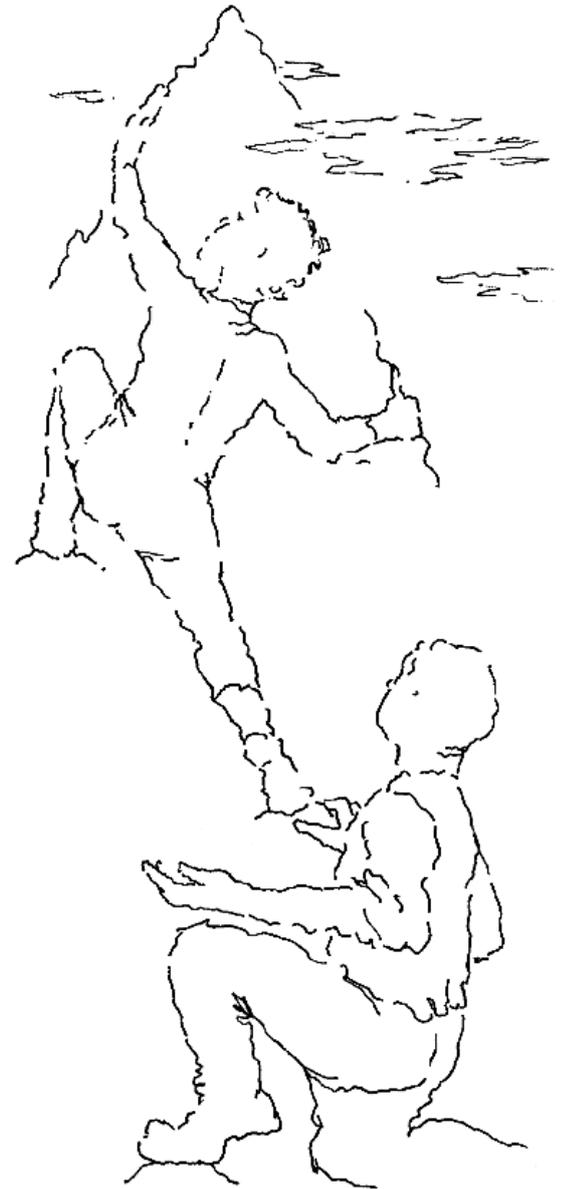
## Resilience

### Teaching fortitude in family life

Parenting itself is a veritable school of fortitude: the 200 things you do every day before 9am when there are small children in the house, the sleep deprivation a nursing mum endures, midnight vigil for a sick child, the second job to make the school fees... every family has its own success stories. One mum was describing how she raised six children of her own, and a seventh adopted, all while mail sorting on night shift for sixteen years! Impressive. John Paul II's memories of his own father, *'He never had to be tough on me because he was so tough on himself'*, remind us how parental heroism can be in reach of mums and dads, and of the immeasurable good that results from parental example.

Yet our own lack of fortitude can also frustrate the natural process. We can schedule our weekly golf game so it impedes family relationships; we can allow the list of repairs around the house to become a standing joke; we can justify habitual crankiness with children even though we all know in our heart, as one parent reflected, *'The more you are grumpy, the more he forgets, but the more I praise him, the more he remembers.'* Consider this true story: *'I was treating a lady, and she broke into tears after telling me it was her fortieth birthday coming up. "I have been married for 15 years but I cannot talk to my husband. He watches television each night. I need to talk but his attitude is 'What is there to talk about?'"* There is a real danger that we put comfortable limits on how we put ourselves out. Author Jim Stenson insists that the best thing we can do for children is to give them the example of striving always to improve ourselves.

Sometimes also, parents develop a default setting, behaving as they saw their own parents behave, for better and also for worse. One mother was reflecting how her husband's anger with their baby on occasions seemed an eerie reflection of her father-in-law's personality. Your children are likely to grow into adulthood uncannily like, perhaps uncomfortably like, you.



That's it ... you can do it!  
Just one step further Edmund m'lad.

In a sense children do raise themselves; they model themselves constantly on those to whom they have the greatest exposure. Parents therefore need to manage the influence of friends and peer groups. We must manage the voices talking to our children when those voices are unhealthy. Young people will imitate anyone (and sometimes even anything) they spend time with, even virtually or in their imaginations. The bottom line is that we become like those we associate with.

## A selection of successful strategies

✍ Be positive. Give failures a positive spin. See mistakes are learning opportunities. Martin Seligman argues, *'Children need to fail. They need to feel sad, anxious, and angry.... Strong emotions, such as anxiety, depression, and anger exist for a purpose: they galvanise you into action to change yourself or your world, and by doing so to terminate the negative emotion... When we impulsively protect our children from failure, we deprive them of learning the skills (of persistence).'*

✍ Don't find someone to blame. Blame doesn't solve problems. It is a clumsy effort to force someone else to admit guilt, but in the process it blinds us to our own failings and complicates corrections.

✍ Seek to understand. It may have been a mystic who first said, *'Put love and you will find love'*, but it was a mystic who understood human beings. Put love means to listen without judging; apologise for the times you didn't listen, jumped to conclusions, or raked up past mistakes.

✍ Avoid correction by nagging, sarcasm, lectures, or the cold shoulder. Hear the child out, reevaluate your conclusions and if you still need to correct, give clear reasons, make the correction calmly and help the child to mend the consequences of actions.

✍ Be encouraging. A parent who gives lots of encouragement gives an important background message of trust in the young person's good intentions, and confidence that present difficulties will pass.

Don't allow a small matter to escalate.

✍ Remember that your child loves you even when he or she says the most hurtful things. Don't take the harshness personally. Your reassuring love is important, all the more important when there is a show of rejecting it. Try to understand what is taking away your child's peace.

✍ Never, never, put your son or daughter into a corner with words like: *'If you get a bad report then find somewhere else to live.'* Things said in the heat of a moment can too easily be regretted in the years that follow. Show self-control.

✍ The calmer the better! Parents who show self-control keep the line of communication open and model the behaviour they want their child to adopt. But if you do lose your temper, find it before bedtime. Apologise for your part in the fracas. And then listen.

✍ Remember: hard lessons can be the best lessons.

✍ 'No' is a loving word.

**Source:** [Institute of Advanced Family Studies, Internatinonal University of Catalonia.](http://www.uic.es/en/marriage-education-family)  
e-MEF program. <http://www.uic.es/en/marriage-education-family>