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embracing adulthood

PREPARING CHILDREN FOR LIFE'S CHALLENGES

BY MICHELLE KELLEY, LCSW



The word “adult” has recently become a verb as well as an adjective. As in, “Don’t make me adult today!” What does it really mean to be an adult?

All adults have experienced times when they don’t feel as though they have it together, even though they’re living the adult life. Real adulting means facing our long-term goals responsibly and honestly; we concurrently accept the fact that our days are filled with obligations, many of them mundane. It means that we embrace the bad with the good, even when we don’t feel like we have it together.

Accepting adulthood is a necessary part of growing up, and teaching our kids the skills to effectively transition into independence starts at home. For kids to maintain good emotional well-being, it’s essential that they watch their parents practice mature and

responsible behavior even when they don’t feel like it. When children learn to embrace responsibility, take pride in their work, and do tasks that they would rather not, then they are well on their way to developing into an effective adult.

Many households have two working parents who come home at the end of the day exhausted and irritable. Meal preparation and family dinners are rushed, if they happen at all. Taking time to teach kids basic life skills may fall to the bottom of your to do list, or maybe it’s just easier to do a task yourself rather than explain patiently what your expectations are. When it comes to raising young adults, a lot of responsibility is learned by the example set by the parents, but certain things (such as cooking and budgeting) need to be taught.

In my work with girls and young women, I often assist them in learning essential life skills such as budgeting, managing money and time management. I can’t help them with things like cooking and sewing, and some would argue these are not essential skills, but they can be character-building. My daughter took sewing classes growing up and she takes pride in being able to hem her skirt or make her prom dress. This has been a step on her path to adulthood.

“Adulting” also means coming up with a plan for one’s life and identifying the next steps. Oftentimes, a person has certain expectations as to what it should “feel” like to be an adult. Many aspects of adult life are out of our control but there are numerous factors that are very much in our hands. Let’s review some “adult behaviors” which we can manage.

Physical health - to optimize our physical health, we must accept the responsibility to follow a proper diet, exercise regularly, and get our annual physical exams.

Emotional stability - being able to understand and manage our emotions so we can cope with daily stresses.

Financial responsibility – managing our money, learning to budget and living within our means.

Purpose in life – everyone has a purpose in this world but it’s up to each individual to discover their “calling.”

It’s important to remember and expect that life will throw you curveballs — no exceptions. Everyone will experience hardships and heartaches. They will have to realize that being a grown up requires effort, trial and error, and persistence. They will have to accept every setback as an opportunity for growth and maturation. At the end of the day, adulting comes down to developing good habits, making wise decisions, and contributing positively to society; transitioning to adulthood occurs gradually. Preparing our children for the real world is our job as parents.

Millennials who have successfully learned these skills — both practical and character-building — are passion-driven and out of the box thinkers. They make great entrepreneurs and I personally am excited about the potential of this generation. ❖