

Helping Kids Deal with Embarrassment

For most adults minor embarrassments are just a part of life — annoying, but inevitable and hardly a big deal. But for many kids, embarrassing experiences can be very upsetting and in some cases, may lead to serious issues like anxiety and avoidance. We cannot protect our children from embarrassment, but we can help them build the resilience and confidence they need to deal with it in a healthy way. Here are some tips to help our children cope with this challenge:

Model behavior

Kids look to parents for cues on how to manage difficult emotions. “As parents we set the behavioral tone for our kids,” says Dr. Rachel Busman, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. “So when we’re helping children learn healthy emotional habits, the first step is to consider how we handle similar situations in our own lives.” Examining how you deal with embarrassing experiences at home will help you set an example of healthy behavior for your child. Help children to keep calm, to not obsess over what happened to cause embarrassment, and do not tease them or poke fun at the incident.

Take your child's embarrassment seriously but do not overreact

There is no yardstick for embarrassment. If your child is embarrassed it is important not to dismiss his feelings, even if the situation that caused them sounds like no big deal. “We naturally want to downplay embarrassing experiences by saying things like ‘it’s not as bad as you think,’” says Dr. Busman. “But when kids are experiencing these big, upsetting emotions, that can feel like a brush-off.” Additionally, do not assume that your child wants or needs you to do something about it. When a self-conscious child worries that a parent will overreact or make an embarrassing situation worse, he is likely to be reluctant to share his feelings.

Praise positive skills

If your child shares an embarrassing situation with you, take care to validate her feelings, but do not dwell on them or over comfort. Instead, praise positive coping skills. Reframing negative experiences will help your child identify healthy reactions and practice them.

Create perspective

If your child fell in gym class and other kids laughed, it may seem to him as though everyone saw it, everyone laughed, and no one will ever forget it – ever. “Kids can be egocentric,” explains Dr. Busman, “so when something embarrassing happens to your child, it can feel like everyone is thinking about it as much as he is, when most kids will have moved on by the next day.” Learning to put feelings and experiences in context will help your child gain perspective and build resilience. Helping your child gain perspective without minimizing his feelings will make it easier for him to move past negative experiences and give him an important tool for building self-awareness in the future.

Source: Rae Jacobson for The Child Mind Institute