

Commentary...

Flexibility is key to resilience

By Edie Jones
Columnist

While reading the commentary in the October 13 issue of *The Nugget* entitled “Resilient Sisters must be ambidextrous,” it occurred to me that what was being talked about was flexibility.

Mitchell Luftig, the author, was referring to a concept that Michele Gelfand of the University of Maryland referenced as knowing which circumstances in life require tightening restrictions and when it’s OK to loosen them. The article’s premise was in relation to the collective threat of the pandemic. I’d like us to think about it in relation to all aspects of life.

In studying the work of H. Stephen Glen, in his “Developing Capable People” program, I learned the importance for individuals to perceive themselves as being capable, having significance, and believing they have personal influence. To achieve this they needed skills that help them move through life. One of the categories of those skills he called “Systemic Skills.” These consisted of knowing limits, accepting consequences, and being responsible. His work emphasized that in order to

be responsible an individual needs to adapt and be flexible, to know how to respond to the situation he or she is in.

If you think about it, these are skills we teach our kids. Every parent can relate to instructing their children that it’s OK to behave one way at home while there are different rules when visiting grandparents. Even going to school has times that teach flexibility. Currently, in the classroom you keep your distance, wear your mask, don’t touch other people, sit quietly, and listen to the teacher. During recess, the rules change and there is much more “looseness” in what you can and can’t do. Kids learn very quickly when restrictions are tighter and when a looser way of behaving is OK.

We adults follow these same kinds of norms within our workplaces and social connections. Granted, much has changed in what is appropriate and our society is generally much “looser”

than years back; however, there are still socially acceptable ways of behaving that change by the situation presented. They may depend on where you live, your status in society, your age, or whether you are in a church or a gymnasium. Most adults learn these early, and consciously or unconsciously adapt to the situation without difficulty.

One of the other areas of skills taught by Glen is “Judgmental Skills,” the ability to use wisdom and evaluation. I believe these were also being addressed in the article and are skills most of us try to put into practice as often as possible. Again, skills parents diligently try to instill in their young children, so they have the ability to make good choices when they reach the teen years.

The title of the article referred to “Resilient Sisters” implying that collectively our community has the characteristics of being resilient. What, I ask,

does this mean? In the book “Raising Resilient Children” by Robert Brooks, Ph.D., and Sam Goldstein, Ph.D., we learn there are many qualities that make up resiliency. Some of these are the ability to solve problems constructively, the development of coping strategies that promote growth, and the ability to define what you do and don’t have control over, focusing attention on where you can make a difference.

All of these are qualities we want our kids to grow up with, so as adults they can become self-reliant individuals, capable of handling whatever comes their way. These are also qualities I’m sure most of us want in everyone who makes up the community of Sisters.

I was recently talking with a colleague who said he felt many have forgotten how to interact effectively with others. The article I’ve referred to states that Gelfand is optimistic that America will learn to communicate better about

collective threats and be encouraged to deal with them collectively. Let’s hope so. I believe this means there is hope that we will be able to respond to our current state with a mindset that considers what is best for society and not just what we individually desire.

This time that we’re in, “the COVID years,” presents many opportunities to teach our kids. There are so many “teachable moments” taking place. First off, learning to adapt and be flexible is paramount to being a responsible adult. In addition, using good judgment in solving problems, coping with the world as it is, figuring out what we can influence and where we can make a positive difference, are built into every day we are living through. Everything we do teaches our kids something, good and bad. Let’s strive to be role models of the good things we want to teach. Then our community will truly be resilient.



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