

Empathize with your child—up to a certain point

Is there such a thing as being too supportive when it comes to your child's negative emotions? Experts say yes.

According to research, parents who are overly sympathetic about their children's troubled feelings think their kids are more socially well-adjusted than others. Those same kids' teachers, however, rate them as being less well-adjusted than their peers.

Why the disconnect? It could be that when parents indulge every bad mood their child has, the child never stops to consider that there may be little justification for that mood.

This doesn't mean you should ignore your child's feelings. But rather than rush to agree every time she feels she's been wronged:

- Ask for details. If your child says a classmate was mean to her, find out more before jumping to her defense. Say, "Tell me what happened." This way, you're encouraging her to open up but not automatically agreeing that she's a victim.
- Challenge her. Your child may be upset that she performed poorly on a math quiz, but was that quiz really "unfair," as she claims? Press her a bit. "Why wasn't it fair?" If the real story is that she didn't study for it, then point that out. She wasn't mistreated; she was irresponsible. It's a hard—but vital—lesson to learn.

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