

Sensitive Souls

One of my favorite children's movies of all times is *The Lion King* and one of the most memorable scenes from that movie for me is when the warthog declares,

“I’m a sensitive soul, though I seem thick-skinned
And it hurts that my friends never stand downwind.”

That one line has been reverberating through my mind ever since the first day of school. In fact, it seems as if all I have been doing the last few weeks is working with sensitive souls and their parents.

The new school year brings many changes and new challenges. Bus routes may have been changed. Children may be starting in a new building. They almost all will have new teachers, a new curriculum, new behavior plans. Some of their new teachers will be more business-like and less touchy-feely, perhaps for the first time. New recess times and the need to connect with new children at recess. The school day might be starting earlier or later, and there is probably more homework and a higher need for organization than last year.

So many of our children are sensitive souls! They might not be worried about the same thing that worried the warthog, but they do worry. Will my teacher like me? Will there be anybody I know on the bus? Will I get picked for classroom projects or recess activities? What if I drop the ball and my team loses the game? And the worries aren't all about the school day. Just try bringing home something for one child and not the other. Or making a meal that is known as the favorite meal of only one of your children. And if you or your partner travel for business and have to be away for a few days now and then, the sensitive souls in your family will surely let you know how much they are hurting when you are gone.

Was it always like this? Perhaps. In any case, it is probably impossible to compare with previous generations, but when I try to picture my parents or grandparents, uncles and aunts, as children, my sense is they were thicker-skinned than our children. I remember being told that life included hard times and that it was up to us to be ready for whatever came our way. Is this different from the messages we are sending our children today?

It makes sense to me that the children would be sensitive souls and that isn't what worries me. But I sometimes worry when the parents seem to be sensitive souls too. That is, if the child is nervous about whether or not there will be somebody to play with at recess, that seems perfectly normal. But if the parent is heartsick about the possibility that their child might not be perfectly comfortable every minute of every day, then I am more likely to worry.

It is up to us to use the uncomfortable moments of our children's lives to teach them something about themselves and about what to expect from life. One of my favorite mantras when children are upset or worried about some less-than-perfect moment in life is "life includes this." And the other is "let's see what we can learn from this." Even though the school year is just a week or two old, I have shared these two clichés with dozens of parents. By how we are with our emotions, we teach our children how to be with their emotions. Resilience and optimism are taught by parents only and the richest times for teaching resilience and optimism are uncomfortable times. Maybe this is why our children need to have uncomfortable times so often during their childhood. May we all find the strength to resist the impulse to step in, rescue, and do too much for our children. May we be able to see the uncomfortable times for the teaching opportunities they provide.

Dr. Steve Kahn is the author of *[Insightful Parenting: Making Moments Count](#)*. Please check www.drstevekahn.com for additional (free) articles about parenting or to learn more about the book, available both in paperback and as an audio book. Please feel free to share this article with others.