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# SETTING UP KIDS TO FAIL

ANXIOUS mums and dads are creating a generation of “namby-pamby” kids with high stress levels and low resilience.

Research by University of Melbourne Professor Michael Bernard and the Australian Council for Educational Research and involving 130,000 students showed young people were becoming more stressed and less equipped to cope with the demands of schoolwork.

The survey of primary and secondary school-aged children found 17 per cent had low social and emotional wellbeing, the number experiencing stress had risen from 23 per cent in 2003 to 49 per cent, and 41 per cent said they lacked confidence in their ability to cope with difficult schoolwork, up from 24 per cent 15 years ago.

In addition, underachievement was at an all-time high with 70 per cent saying they could do better at school.

“There appears to be an epidemic of ‘namby-pamby’ kids with poor resilience – as a result of highly anxious parents and the pressure of social media,” Professor Bernard said.

“The attitude of self-acceptance is the core of student wellbeing. It combats the tendency to take things personally, which creates the high levels of depression and anxiety young people today are experiencing,” he said.

“In some schools, problems with resilience, including anxiety management, top the list of concerns, especially in ‘high-performing’ schools with parents who tend to over-protect and who communicate extremely high expectations for achievement.”

He said parents and teachers did a world of good when they acted as coaches of young people’s social-emotional development.

“That includes not taking too much responsibility for the young person’s welfare and discussing ways

they can help the young person manage their emotions,” he said.

## TIPS FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE



### Babies (0-3 years)

When they fall over or experience a minor accident with no injury, resist the temptation to immediately rush over and soothe them. Count to 10 in your head before intervening to encourage them to self soothe.

Play games with your baby that are challenging and require persistence. For example, solving simple puzzles or building a block tower.

### Little kids (3-6 years)

Encourage safe risk taking.

Find activities where your child will have to take some physical risks and praise them for taking on a challenge even when they are scared.

Encourage relationships with other adults but require them to adapt to different environments.

For example, having a sleepover at a friends place.

### Kids (7-12 years)

Build in unstructured play time into their lives. This encourages them to find ways to overcome boredom by being creative. Reward effort more than results. Frequently praise your child when they show persistence and reward them for getting better at something rather than being the best

### Teenagers (13 years and over)

Manage technology use and ensure

that they have balanced life interests that include contributing to family life, trying hard at school and



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having a part-time job.  
Encourage them to volunteer and donate part of their income to charity to foster generosity.

**Jono Nicholas is a father of three and chief executive of frontline youth and parents service Reach-Out, which is accessed by more than 1.58 million Australians annually. Website: reachout.com Twitter: @jononicholas**

