

Abraham was willing to sacrifice literally everything. His family - his home, and now his Beloved son Isaac. We read this distressing story each Rosh HaShana and have trouble relating. On the one hand we are impressed with Abraham, on the other appalled.

We laud him for believing in something - one G!d, standing up for his beliefs, and going to extremes to influence others and being willing to do whatever it takes. We are all sitting here today because he was a maverick.

But we also criticize him- The story of the Akedah is a difficult one. Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, and Isaac knows it. This is hard to relate to. How could anyone be willing to do that? Isaac suffers. Whether from PTSD or bad parenting, he isn't able to take a stand later in life and is seen as one of the least effective, least productive of all the characters in Genesis. A place holder.

We would never sacrifice our children. We give them every comfort and opportunity they could want. They play on the best teams, go to the best camps, travel all over the world, have amazing parties and celebrations. Their lives are full of awesome opportunities.

All the parents I know would be willing to do anything for their kids. And they do if from a place of caring, protection and love. Good intentions guide their every step.

Even with all of these opportunities, anxiety disorders are on the rise. Psychologist Jean Twenge claims that the iGen, internet generation, is "obsessed with safety." Physical and emotional. IGen's who started arriving on college campuses in 2013 are risk averse- they don't want to try things at which they might fail and they don't want to bring controversy into their lives. Howard Gardner points out that with iphones, kids never get lost. They never have to ask directions or figure out where they are.-- Conversely, they never have the pride of getting out of a tough situation.

Listen to the title of this book. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*

The authors notice something unprecedented and ... frightening: a generation, including its most privileged and educated members... have been politically and socially "stunted" by a false and deepening belief in its own fragileness.

They point out, This is a generation... that has racked up the most hours of homework (and screen time) in history but also the fewest ever of something so simple as unsupervised outdoor play. They say, "When adult-supervised activities crowd out free play, children are less likely to develop the art of association," along with other social skills central to the making of good citizens capable of making healthy compromise.

Maybe we are closer to Abraham than we want to admit. We are coming close to sacrificing our children.

We try to shield our children from the mess that is life. And in doing so We don't prepare them for failure. And failure happens- it is often painful, and not a fun way to learn, but we do learn from failure. One of the best gifts we can give our children is resilience. The ability to bounce back from disappointments. In order to bounce back you need to fail or at least stumble, sometimes.

I recently learned a new term to for this overprotective style of parenting. It is **Lawnmower parents** - They don't just hover, like helicopter parents so that they can pick their kids up when they fall down. Lawnmower parents run ahead of their kids and mow down the weeds to save their child from any potential inconvenience, problem or discomfort.

What would you do?

Imagine your 10-year-old daughter is involved in a high-dive competition. She's past the point of participation trophies and genuinely wants to win. She performs as cleanly as she can, but she doesn't earn scores as high as the other girls. Ultimately, she goes home with nothing and is devastated. How would you respond to her?

- A. "Well I thought you were the best of all of those girls."
- B. "It's OK. We'll get 'em next time."
- C. "Those girls were better than you, which is why you didn't win."

That last one surprised me a bit, shouldn't we be cheerleaders for our kids. Isn't that the best way to help them succeed. But Ramy Momoud, an instructor of Teacher's Leadership Development at University of Texas and creator of this scenario says:

"Only C, "Those girls were better than you, which is why you didn't win," forces the child to focus on her role in that particular failure. ... Encouraging this discussion helps her brush it off, learn from the experience and continue to improve toward accomplishing the goal.

If we can learn to stop deflecting failure, to stop mowing that lawn,...we can support our kids as they build the confidence to knock those weeds over themselves.

Building confidence has always been the role of parents and teachers. A famous Mussar teacher*, would give his students drastic challenges so they could grow in Bitachon - trust. A combination of trust in G!d and trust in themselves.

-One student was afraid of the dark. Rabbi Yosef Yussel instructed him to spend the night in the cemetery saying psalms.

-Another student was afraid of being humiliated. To him, the rabbi gave the challenge of going into a bakery and asking for nails and into a hardware store and asking for bread.

While harsh, the point of both these challenges was to condition the students to have Bitachon and realize that nothing harmful would happen to them if they faced their fears. To teach them resilience.

As we listen to the Akedah and hear the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac, let it motivate us to make sure we are helping to foster a generation of resilient, independent, risk takers. Young adults who will do more than just move the story forward, but ones who will engage in social discourse and uncomfortable conversations. Ones who will be players in the story and work to create a world that challenges injustice and strives for equality for all and most of all believes that they can.

www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2017/08/30/lawnmower-parents-raising-generation-entitled-kids-handle-adversity

NYT Book Review p. 12 Sept 2. 2018 Who Do We Think We Are. Thomas Chatterton Williams

The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure. Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt

*Rabbi Yosef Yussel Horowitz, the founder of the Novardak school of Mussar (19th -20th century, Lithuania) (source: Alan Morinis, Bitachon source sheet)