

FOLAN: THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTING FROM THE SIDELINES

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As a parent of high schoolers and a veteran educator, I know all too well that the start of a new school year elicits a range of emotions for parents. The good – joy, excitement, and hope. The bad – anxiety, and, yes, the ugly – fear. If we, as parents, are to successfully navigate the school year, we must learn to identify how these emotions affect us, our actions, and how we parent.

As a parent, “we are only as happy as our least happy child” for good reason. We must also remember the discomfort felt by our child, and what we feel as parents is natural and part of their maturation process, and our enduring commitment to them. During each school year, all school-age children face a range of setbacks and challenges. While some are greater than others, everyone scores poorly on a test, skins their knee, gets cut from a team, earns a detention, has their feelings hurt, makes friends, and then loses friends. Everyone feels the pain of not being included to play, not being invited to a party, falling in love, and then heartbreak. It is easy for us to forget our own adolescences; a challenging time filled with highs and lows. We made it, it was not always easy, it came with scar tissue, but we were better for it.

As parents, we can quickly retreat into the pain of our old wounds as our children gain theirs. In these moments, we must avoid the temptation of riding their emotional roller coaster. Instead,



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accompany, support, empathize, and love your children on their journey, but do it from the sideline. This approach will help you to maintain perspective and clarity, and, in turn, provide your children with better support.

Parenting is not easy, so remember to be gentle on yourself as you navigate it. Take an extra breath, give teachers, other students, coaches, and administrators the benefit of the doubt. After having first listened, try to understand everyone’s perspectives. Be slow to speak, be considerate and kind, and when needed forgive. While it is our primal desire to immediately “fix things,” it is far better to

empower our children to cultivate their voice and teach self-advocacy.

This fall, remember to have faith in yourself and your children. Lean into empathy and compassion as much as possible. The setbacks that our children encounter and their ultimate response, and to a degree ours, shape their character. The principles that our children earn over a lifetime, and those lessons learned through adversity instill resiliency, build confidence, and teach self-reliance. That belief gives me hope and provides the strength I need as a parent and an educator.