

THE BACKPACK WE ALL CARRY

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“Back-to-School Night” doesn’t just bring classroom tours, new teachers, and stacks of syllabi. For parents, it stirs a storm of emotions: joy, hope, and pride — mixed with worry, uncertainty, and a dash of fear. As both a parent and an educator, I’ve felt all of it. And I’ve learned this truth: when our child struggles, we struggle too.

We feel it in our bones. It’s why people say, “We’re only as happy as our least happy child.” But here’s the paradox. While our instinct to rush in and fix everything comes from love, it can actually rob our kids of what they need most — resilience. Every year brings stumbles: a failed test, a skinned knee, getting cut from the team, or a friendship that fractures. These are not signs of failure. They are part of adolescence.

Writer and director John Hughes captured it perfectly in the 1980s: the heartbreak of “Sixteen Candles,” the angst of “The Breakfast Club,” the bittersweet triumphs of “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off.” His films endure not just for their great soundtracks, but because they remind us that adolescence is messy, funny, painful, and formative — all at once. Looking back, we see those hard moments didn’t break us; they shaped us, giving us grit, perspective, and eventually, strength.

An image that helps me is the backpack. Every morning, children



zip one up and sling it over their shoulders. On the surface, it holds pencils, notebooks, and folders. But in reality, every child’s backpack carries much more — worries, dreams, questions, responsibilities. Some loads are light, some are heavy.

And here’s where we as parents and teachers come in. We can’t carry the backpack for them, nor should we. But we can influence what goes inside. We can add skills and tools, not weights: confidence instead of doubt, encouragement instead of pressure, opportunities instead of obstacles.

Children don’t need us to step onto the field and play the game for them. They need us on the sidelines — steady, calm, compassionate, and present. From there, we can do something even more powerful: empathize, encourage, and love fiercely, without fixing. When we step

back, we respond with clarity instead of panic, with support instead of control. It’s easy to forget that we, too, once carried heavy backpacks.

And if we’re honest, we still do. There are days we want to cry in the shower — and that’s part of the journey too. But in those moments, we reach back into the principles we’ve picked up along the way: keeping humble hearts, staying ready to help, and choosing to forgive. These lessons steady us, and they’re exactly what our children need most.

In the end, our job isn’t to carry our children’s backpacks, but to walk beside them — steady and open-hearted — reminding them they are never alone, that they are capable even on the hardest days, and that no stumble can ever diminish their worth, because our love is the ground beneath their steps.