

Helping Children Learn to Cope with Failure

Do you ever wonder about the effects of your expectations on your child? What do you model when faced with feeling that you have failed in some respect or another?

There are many ways in which we as parents can help children to cope with not meeting expectations of themselves or those others have for them.

The quotes below reflect the need for us as humans to fail as part of a journey to success, so it is very important that families are able to applaud effort and encourage resilience when a child feels that they may have failed.

'It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all - in which case, you fail by default.' J.K. Rowling

'You will have failures in your life, but it is what you do during those valleys that will determine the heights of your peaks.' Rahm Emanuel

'In life, the things that go wrong are often the very things that lead to other things going right.' Arriana Huffington

'Nobody else is paying as much attention to your failures as you are... To everyone else, it's just a blip on the radar screen, so just move on.' Jerry Zucher

'I found that nothing in life is worthwhile unless you take risks.' Denzel Washington

'The person who doesn't make mistakes is unlikely to do anything.' Paul Arden

'I can accept failure. Everyone fails at something. But I can't accept not trying... Fear is an illusion.' Michael Jordan

'Everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occurs while you're climbing it.' Andy Rooney

'Failures are finger posts on the road to achievements.' C.S. Lewis

Parents play a vital role in helping children deal with both success and failure. Recently, Anh Do, Vietnamese-born Australian author, actor and comedian summed up an experience he had as a child. The experience illustrated the importance his father put on effort and that rewarding effort is important to help the child develop self worth. Anh prepared what he believed to be a fantastic speech to convince his peers and teachers he ought to be voted School Captain or at least a Prefect in Year 6. He returned home feeling that he had failed when he did not achieve either position. Anh's father gleefully celebrated Ahn's efforts and took the family out for dinner! We can imagine how this helped with Ahn's resilience and preparedness to strive for other pursuits rather than to give up because of a perceived failure.

Some guidelines to help with creating a culture in your family in which failure to achieve is ok:

- Make sure that your child knows that you love him or her regardless of how he or she does. Never tie your love for your child to success or failure in accomplishing a task.
- Have realistic expectations concerning your child's performance. Know what your child is capable of achieving and set goals based on what is appropriate for your child.
- Children need to know that successes and failures are a part of life and they will know this from your lead and model. By observing you, your child will learn how you

handle the emotions that accompany failure. Knowing how to get back up and try again after a failure is very important to model too.

- Provide an environment at home that has structure and order as this helps children learn that life goes on after things have not gone well. The daily routine can be both comforting and reassuring.
- Children may experience joy, pride, guilt, shame, sadness, or a host of other emotions. Help your child deal with their emotions by naming how they are feeling and listening and talking to them which helps them to feel validated and understood.
- Give your child access to other caring adults and friends who can also provide guidance and direction in a child's life. They can serve as role models too. Your child can observe how they respond to success and failure.
- Not all kids are going to do well most of the time. According to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory we have at least nine different ways of being smart. Google this and show your children. Help them work out "which smarts are you?"
- If your child is struggling academically, it is important to help them to be competent in a variety of areas. Self mastery builds confidence - it might be tree climbing, dancing, star gazing, calligraphy, craft, frog hunting, growing vegies, or helping to fix things in the shed. This helps them to build a healthy sense of self, especially if they struggle with doing well in particular subjects at school.

We appreciate how heart-wrenching and difficult it is to support a child who feels they have not met either their own or the expectations of others. It is the strength of your relationship with your child which counts most and you are their strongest feedback loop through what you say and what you model. We all want our children to be happy but without resilience it is unlikely happiness will follow, so the failures along the way are great opportunities to develop that resilience.

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