

Cultivating Resilience - Children Need To Fail In Order To Succeed

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September 16, 2022



Coach Myrna--September 16, 2022

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Did you know that Dr. Martin E. P. Seligman discovered that ***children need to fail in order to succeed?*** In fact, it can help them figure out how to succeed next time. He discovered that until the early 1960s, achievement was the most important goal that parents sought to instill in their children. But from the later 1960s until the present, the focus of schools and parents has shifted to building up self-esteem.

Despite the increased focus on self-esteem over the past decades, depression in children has continued to grow, now affecting a quarter of all kids today. To combat this trend, Dr. Seligman began the Penn Depression Prevention Project, the first long-term study aimed at children ages eight through twelve. His findings were revolutionary, proving that children can be protected against depression by being taught how to challenge their pessimistic thoughts. His book *The Optimistic Child* offers parents and

teachers the tools developed in this study to teach children of all ages life skills that transform helplessness into proficiency and bolster self-esteem.

Dr. Seligman says that *to develop resilience, children need to develop optimism.*

This involves changing one's belief from "I can't" to "I can." Parents can support this transformation by creating an environment where it is safe to try and fail, as well as helping their child discover the gifts that come from failure: the opportunity to evaluate, the motivation to try harder, the chance to be creative, and the development of maturity.

This helps our child develop *a growth mindset* instead of a fixed mindset, *putting the emphasis on the steps the child took to reach the end result.* By focusing on process, it shows that getting stuck, asking for help, and trying new strategies are an important part of the process. How we respond to our child can result in their feelings of helplessness or sense of accomplishment. How we respond to our child's hurtful words or actions can impact their resilience.

Suppose I take my children on an outing to the zoo, and my daughter is teasing her brother. She says, "You know that you are adopted, right? Daddy is not your real dad. Your dad is a gorilla. You had better behave today because right next to the zoo is the prison, and if you do anything wrong, you will get sent there for the rest of your life."

Of course, as the parent, I need to step in and say something. But imagine the impact of two vastly different parental responses to the daughter.

- "I am sick of this. Why are you always such a brat? I planned such a lovely day, and you are spoiling everything. I don't know why I even bother to try to plan things when, without fail, you do something to ruin everything."
- "This teasing has to stop. What has gotten into you? Usually, you are

such a wonderful big sister, sharing your toys and reading your brother stories. You make him feel special. But today, you are not being nice to him, and you are scaring him. I do not like this kind of behavior. You need to stop and apologize to your brother. If you tease him again, you will not be able to play outside after dinner. Do you understand me?"

The first response attacks the child's character and does not give them a way to recover. Speaking in this manner can create a feeling of shame— "I am a bad person." The second response begins with her good qualities and states clearly that today, she is doing something unacceptable. It allows her to feel the guilt—that she has done something wrong—and gives her a chance to correct her behavior.

When a child knows that it is safe to make mistakes or to mess up sometimes, their performance often improves. The knowledge that they have a safe place to try and keep trying until they succeed gives them confidence.

We can see an example of this in the building of the Golden Gate Bridge. In 1933, the work was falling behind the targeted deadlines. One of the crew members had fallen to his death, causing everyone to work more slowly out of fear for their own lives. Although reluctant due to the time crunch, the supervisor took the advice of one of the workers to hoist a safety net into place. Suddenly, the men began to work more quickly and efficiently, and the bridge was soon completed.

What was it that enabled them to work faster and better? It was the removal of the fear of failure. When we create an environment in our home that shows that it is safe to fail and that our child is supported in finding a way to try again, *resiliency is fostered.*

If you enjoyed this short excerpt from "The Gift of Resilience", consider purchasing my book. Find out more here: www.coachmyrna.org/7-gifts-to-give-your-child.html

To purchase my book on Amazon, click here:
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If you would like to know more about what I offer as a coach, please visit my website: www.coachmyrna.org/ Find out more about Safe Conversations www.coachmyrna.org/safe-conversations.html.

