

How Resilience Is Cultivated - Children Need To Fail In Order To Succeed

Myrna Lapres
September 22, 2025



Coach Myrna, September 22, 2025
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Dr. Martin E. P. Seligman, often called the father of Positive Psychology, 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.

This is an except from a chapter in my book. For more, click the link:

www.coachmyrna.org/7-gifts-to-give-your-child.html

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