



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Helping Children Bounce Back from “Failure”

When your child comes home disappointed with a low test score, when their team does not win the soccer game, or when they don't make the cut for the team, what should you do? We all experience “failure” at some point in life. No one is perfect, and no one can be the best at everything they do—and that's OK! But in our society, there is a lot of importance placed on winning, being the best, and getting high scores and high grades. This puts a lot of pressure on children to be good at everything they do.

But did you know Walt Disney was once fired from a job because they said he had no imagination? Oprah Winfrey was told that she was not “fit for television.” And the first *Harry Potter* book J. K. Rowling wrote was rejected by 12 publishers before it was printed. Realizing that these

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extremely successful people did not start out as successful—and were even told that they were bad at what they eventually became successful for—can give “failure” a whole new meaning.

So what is failure? Failure is a necessary part of life. It may feel bad

in the moment, but we can learn a lot from these situations, such as what we need to do differently in order to succeed. For your child, experiencing a negative outcome, or not getting the outcome they hoped for, can feel like failure. Getting a low grade on a test, losing at a competition, or not making the sports team can feel devastating to children. They need your help to see and understand that “failing” is not permanent and does not define who they are or what they can do.

The key message children need to hear is that success or winning is not what is most important. What matters



most is being able to get back up and try again! It is through trying and working hard that we do eventually succeed. It is important for parents to help children find what they can learn from “failing” so they can keep trying and succeed in the next challenge.

How can you help children put a positive spin on failure? What can you do as a parent to help them be able to bounce back and succeed? How can you help them learn from these experiences? Here are some tips on how to respond.



Don't

- Don't offer empty praise to boost their self-esteem.
 - ▶ If you praise your child for every single thing they do, your praise becomes meaningless. It does not boost their self-esteem because most kids can see through insincere praise.
 - ▶ Yes, it is good to praise your child for trying, but don't just leave it at that. Follow the “Do” tips below to help them bounce back and be resilient.
- Don't place blame on others.
 - ▶ Don't say it was the teacher's, coach's, or referee's fault. This will teach children to blame others instead of accepting responsibility for their role in the situation.

- Don't tell your child the test, sport, or competition does not matter.
 - ▶ It matters to them! That's why it is disappointing. Don't tell your child that something important to them does not matter.



Do

- Do let your child know you understand why they are upset. It is very disappointing when things don't go the way you had hoped, especially when you tried hard.
 - ▶ Let them have space to feel those emotions. It is hard as a parent to watch your child be unhappy, but emotions, good or bad, have a purpose. Help coach them on healthy ways to cope with the negative feelings they are experiencing. You could say, "How about taking a walk in the sunshine? That always helps me feel better."
- Do let your child know it is okay not to be perfect or "the best." Remind yourself that your child does not have to be and will not be the best at everything they do.
 - ▶ You do not have to be perfect or the best to matter. Reassure them that you love them and that no one is perfect.
 - ▶ Everyone "fails" at some point in life, but to F.A.I.L. is really just a person's **First Attempt In Learning**. Learning to do something well is a process, and it takes time and hard work. Even the most talented only reach their full potential when they practice and put forth effort.

- ▶ As parents, we can get caught up in comparing our children to others, and this can be unhealthy for both ourselves and our children.
- ▶ We all have talents, and sometimes it may take a little while for your child to learn what their strengths are. You can help them see what strengths they have and help them build on those areas.
- Praise your child for the effort, not the outcome.
 - ▶ Let them know you are proud of them for their hard work, *if* they really did work hard. Praise them when you know they tried their best, and encourage them to always put forth their best effort.
 - ▶ Praise the effort your child put in, not the outcome. For example, give praise for how often they practiced for the spelling bee, not for winning the spelling bee.
- Help your child figure out what they can do differently to do better next time.
 - ▶ Help them focus on the fun aspects of the task so they will continue to enjoy it.
 - ▶ Help them recognize that it may have been their preparation that led to failure, not their ability. You can help your child explore different ways of practicing or studying that may work better.

By following these suggestions, you can help your children learn from their failures and develop the ability to bounce back and keep trying even when things get hard.

References

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Dr. Carol S. Dweck

GRIT: The Power of Passion and Perseverance by Dr. Angela Duckworth

Visit tips.extension.msstate.edu for additional parenting resources.

Publication 3526 (150-09-20)

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Produced by Agricultural Communications.

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Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. GARY B. JACKSON, Director