

Helping kids who fear failure



From our guest contributor, Michele Borba

One of the inevitable facts of life is that everyone makes mistakes. Granted, some mistakes are more significant than others and harder to get over, but they are a part of life. How individuals deal with those mistakes is significant to their self-esteem.

There are many ways parents can help erase the idea that "mistakes are bad." Keep in mind that changing behavior takes time and consistency. Finally, remember that your own way of dealing with mistakes is the most important lesson your child can ever learn on the subject. What follows are some suggestions to help your child erase the fear of making mistakes:

Make Mistakes "OK"

Tell Your Child, "It's OK to make a mistake." Too many children are suffering from perfectionism. They try to be perfect. When a mistake happens (as it's bound to from time to time) the child is devastated and interprets this as meaning

he/she is “unworthy.” Every now and then, tell your child, “It’s OK to make mistakes. It happens to all of us.”

Admit Your Own Mistakes

It is important for parents to admit they do make mistakes. Children see you as “all powerful and all knowing.” Obviously, parents do make mistakes, but, often-times, they keep them to themselves. Tell your child a mistake you’ve made recently. Discuss a mistake you remember making as a child.

Model Turning Your Mistake Around

Yes, parents make mistakes, but high-achieving individuals learn from their errors. As you admit your mistake, remember to tell your child what you will do differently the next time. You could say, “I made the mistake of... and this is what I’ll do instead...”

Share Mistakes of Famous Individuals

Anytime the opportunity arises, point out a mistake made by a famous individual so that your child recognizes mistakes happen to everyone. Books are rich with sources. Newspapers always have fresh ideas. Here are a few examples you could use:

- Abraham Lincoln: Defeated for public office eight times before being elected President of the United States.
- Wright Brothers: Took seventy times to get the Kitty Hawk off the ground.
- Louisa May Alcott: Told by countless publishers that no one would ever read Little Women.
- Babe Ruth: The year he hit the most home runs he had the most strike-outs.
- Beethoven: Told by his music teacher that he was hopeless as a composer.
- Michael Joran: Cut from his high school basketball team.
- Walt Disney: Fired by a newspaper editor for “lacking great ideas.” Went bankrupt several times and was told repeatedly to “get rid of the mouse because there’s no

potential in it.”

- Thomas Edison: Was told by his teacher that he was too stupid to learn anything.
- Charles Darwin: Did poorly in his early grade and even failed a university medical course.
- Woodrow Wilson: A Rhodes Scholar and President of the United States didn't learn the alphabet until he was eight and didn't read until he was eleven.
- Albert Einstein: Did not talk until age four or read until age nine. He failed his college entrance exams.
- Wilma Rudolph: Contracted polio at age four, crippling her as a child. She was told she would never walk but decided to become a runner. She went on to win three Olympic gold medals and was named the “Fastest Woman in the World.”

Help Your Child Learn Positive Self-Talk

If you notice your child is very tense and concerned about making mistakes, help him/her learn to say inside his/her head a positive, affirming statement such as “I am calm and in control” or “I will try my best.” The more your child says the statement, the more he/she will begin to believe it.

Help Your Child Label the Mistake as the Problem, Not Himself

Often, the most self-devaluing part of making mistakes is not the mistake, but how the child chooses to interpret the error. Help your child admit he/she made a mistake (“I got this one wrong”) and then help him/her label the mistake as the problem and not himself/herself (“I forgot the capital of Nevada”).

Plan a Strategy for Next Time

After your child can admit the mistake and relabels the mistake as the error (not himself/herself), the final step is to develop a plan for next time: “This is what I'll do differently next time. I'll study the capitals ten minutes a night for the next two weeks.”



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