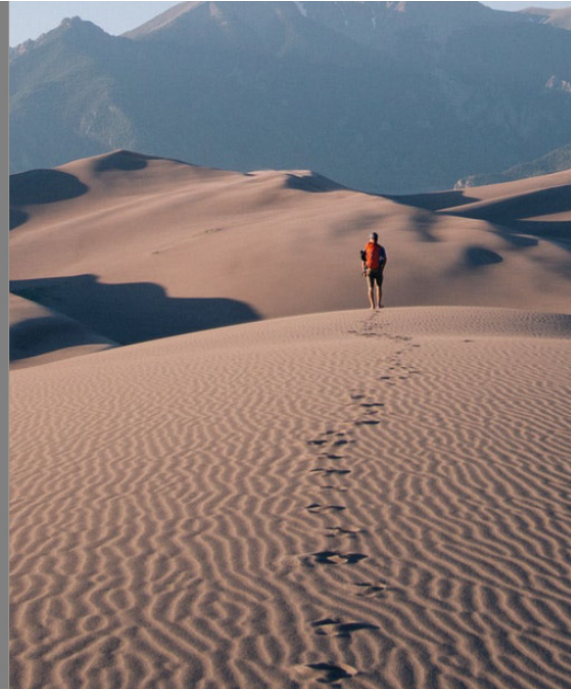


Helping kids rebound from mistakes

“Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.”

-Winston Churchill

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From our guest contributor, Michele Borba.

Be an example of bouncing back. The first step is the most important: *model to your children how you bounce back.* My girls scout leader years ago, Mrs. Flora Cox, was an expert. Before she started a task she wasn't sure she could do (such as lighting a fire with sticks or setting up a tent) she'd always say, "I'm not stopping until I succeed." And she made sure we overheard her. We soon found ourselves copying her words. I now realize she intentionally made a few mistakes, but did so to show us she wouldn't give up. Her example was lasting. So take a pledge to show your children how you won't give up at the first signs of difficulty.

Set realistic expectations. A critical part of bouncing back is making sure your expectations are ones each child is capable of achieving. Look for ways to stretch your children's confidence and abilities, but never to a point where it snaps their spirit. It's a fine line, so make sure you're on the

right path. These questions help you assess if your expectations are realistic:

- Is it reasonable or am I expecting too much?
- Does he have the skills and knowledge to achieve my expectation?
- Is it what she wants or I want for myself?
- Am I conveying that I believe he's capable?

Start a "bounce back!" motto. Develop a family motto to remind your children not to let mistakes get them down. A mother told me she spent one Saturday morning brainstorming mottoes with her family such as "Mistakes Don't Get Us Down!" "The Family that Doesn't Quit," and "We Don't Give Up!" The girls then selected one and created a poster to remind them. Each child then cross-stitched the motto onto a cloth square, sewed it into a pillow, and put it on their bed to remember.

Create a "Stick to It" award. Ask your children to find a thick stick on a hike at least the length of a ruler. Print "Stick to It Award" across the stick with a black marking pen. Explain that it means "hanging in there and not giving up until you finish what you started." Then tell your family to be on alert the next few weeks for other family members showing special "stick-to-itness" and report them to you. Each evening announce the names, and print their initials on the stick. Make sure to tell the recipients what they did to deserve the award. You might even set a contest to see how long it takes to fill the stick with your children's initials.

Help children see mistakes as opportunities. I watched a teacher give a piece of rug yarn to each student on the first school day. She said, "This year you'll be making lots of mistakes. That's how you learn." She explained that she wouldn't be watching their mistakes, but instead to see if they learned from them. Each time they made a mistake-then bounced back-they were to tie a knot in the yarn. After each knot she'd ask them to explain what they learned from their

mistake. Her technique helped her class recognize that mistakes can be a chance to start again, and it's an essential part of learning to rebound. You might try the idea with your family.

Respond to errors noncritically. Many children cut short their opportunities to succeed because they give up when they make mistakes. So the next time your child errs, here are few ways to respond:

- *Stay nonjudgmental and help him focus on what she's trying to achieve.* Calmly ask, "How did you want this to turn out?"
- *Fight the temptation to say, "I told you so."* Instead try, "That's interesting" or "That wasn't what you had in mind, was it?"
- *Don't shame or ridicule.* Nobody likes to make mistakes, and everybody hates to be reminded of making them.
- *Help him learn from the mistake.* A big part of bouncing back is learning from the error. Ask, "What did you learn?" or "What will you do differently next time?"
- *Teach an affirmation to bounce back.* Select a phrase such as: "It doesn't have to be perfect," "It's OK to make mistakes," or "Everybody makes mistakes," then help her practice saying it to encourage herself to bounce back.

Offer support only when needed. No parent wants their children to suffer disappointments, and often our first instinct is to try to remedy their mistakes for them. Doing so deprives them of chances to find solutions and rebound from defeat. So offer help only when really needed, and convey confidence in their abilities to succeed. You might say, "I know you can do it. Hang in there." Of course, when your son or daughter finds the task too difficult and quits, support them. Then help them

recognize what they could do the next time so they do succeed.

The difference between successful and unsuccessful people often lies in how they view their mistakes. By using everyday moments you can help your children not only learn to rebound from mistakes, but also strengthen their self-confidence. And those are two critical lessons they'll use the rest of their lives.



Dr. Michele Borba is an educational psychologist, parenting expert, TODAY show contributor and author of 22 books including *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions: 101 Answers to Your Everyday Challenges and Wildest Worries* and *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*.

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