

Learning Lessons from Failures

Life can be tough, can't it? It is often cruel and hard. Every one of us, regardless of what we have achieved, faces failure from time to time. How we view and respond to failure shapes what we will become in life.

One of the challenges facing parents is to find ways to help students put problems into perspective. As a parent, it is important that you help your child understand that failure is one of the unavoidable "uglies of life" and that, although personal failure is not a requirement for being successful, our failures can be used as stepping stones to achievement.

Certainly, life is not always fair. Everyone has troubles and makes mistakes. Once teenagers accept this truism, they are ready to accept another truism. Failure, if they allow it, can be the best teacher they will ever have. It provides a powerful opportunity for personal change. Obviously, this involves some "bouncing back" and not becoming overcome by life's "unfairness". The line between failure and success is so fine that they are often on the line and do not know it. They have a choice to make, they can learn from their failures or they can be overtaken by them.

Teenagers often respond to the following simple escape plan. Start by relating a time in your life when you failed at something (everyone loves a story). It might have been related to athletics, academics, work, a relationship, or even a social faux pas. If you can share a good laugh, so much the better. Then explain what you learned as result of that failure. Follow this up by handing your child a piece of paper. Ask him or her to draw a line down the center. On one side write down the failure and on the other side, the lessons learned. What is the message here? Successful people are risk takers because they focus on the lessons, not the failures. Certainly, success does not magically arrive as a prize inside a box of cereal. If we want to make something of ourselves we cannot give up.

Accidents on "the road to success" are inevitable. Help your child evaluate the collision and move on. Paul Harvey, the journalist, was once asked to comment on his success. He said, "When I fall down, I get up". Success is never certain - failure is never permanent. It is not what happens to us that matters, but rather what happens in us.

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