

The Gift of Failure with Jessica Lahey

How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed

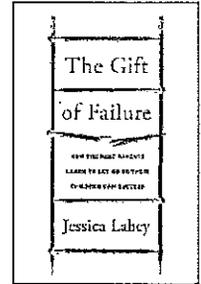
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“To help children succeed, we must allow them to fail.”

Autonomy-Supportive Parenting

In her book, Jessica Lahey focuses on a style of parenting referred to by child development experts as **Autonomy-Supportive Parenting**. This approach aims to help children develop into self-reliant, competent and resilient adults. The key to this approach is to **build a child’s intrinsic motivation** (internal drive). This can be accomplished by:

- ✓ Encouraging **autonomy** (self-reliance).
- ✓ Offering **guidance and support**.
- ✓ Providing opportunities to feel **competent** (not just confident).
- ✓ Letting them know they are **loved** regardless of their performance in school or sports, etc.



Autonomy-Supportive Parents establish clear and specific expectations/boundaries, make themselves physically and emotionally present, and offer guidance when kids get frustrated or need redirection. They realize their job is not to protect their children from failure, but to give them the tools to help them cope with setbacks.

Here are some practical steps to take to become an **Autonomy-Supportive Parent**:

- **Offer support, not control.**
Control is the enemy of autonomy. Controlling behaviors such as nagging and pestering, destroy motivation and hinder your connection and relationship with your child.
- **Use goals instead of rewards.**
Rewards are attempts to control behavior and undermine intrinsic motivation. The use of rewards puts the focus on the end product, such as grades, instead of the long term process, such as learning. Goals, on the other hand, if set by the child, work well to motivate because they remain in *their control*.
- **Treat failures as opportunities for emotional & cognitive growth.**
The challenges and struggles inherent in childhood provide the necessary experiences that teach kids to be resourceful, capable, and creative problem solvers. When we shield our kids from failure, we risk raising emotionally, intellectually, and socially handicapped children, unsure of their direction or purpose without an adult on hand to guide them.
- **Realize that every rescue or intervention is a lesson lost.**
Rescuing your child from mistakes sends the message that you don’t believe he has the ability to find the solution for himself. A few missed lunches or a zero on a homework will reinforce these skills better than lectures, nagging or rescuing ever will. Accept short term mistakes as a way to teach long term lessons.
- **Encourage household duties as the best way for kids to practice competence and contribute.**
Duties provide the opportunity for kids to: gain skills and responsibility doing basic household tasks, learn from their mistakes, gain competence and mastery, and teaches them that the family depends on each other for both labor and love.

Bottom Line: Research has shown over and over again: children whose parents don’t allow them to fail are *less* engaged, *less* enthusiastic about their education, *less* motivated and ultimately *less* successful than children whose parents have supported their autonomy.

From The Gift of Failure by Jessica Lahey

Below are examples of kinds of tasks children are capable of learning. These are “**family obligations**” and not chores. They will learn from little and big failures!

Toddlers & Young Children

- Put dirty clothes in a basket or hamper
- Dress themselves with clothing that is not too complicated
- Put clothes away in drawers
- Throw trash away
- Put away dishes (as long as their cups/dishes are in a low shelf)
- Feed the pet
- Fold simple items of clothing such as pillowcases or washcloths or towels
- Water plants
- Prepare their own snack
- Make their bed

Elementary School Children

- Peeling and chopping most vegetables (model first, teach knife safety)
- Laundry - all of it
- Replace the toilet paper when it is gone - leave the direction the roll spins to your child's discretion
- Setting and cleaning table
- Vacuuming
- Plan, prepare grocery list (audit of food items in fridge/pantry)
- Outdoor work - raking leaves, weeding
- Getting the mail

Middle School/High School Children

- Household repairs - replacing bulbs, painting, simple car maintenance (oil change, tire check)
- Grocery shopping - give them their own list and let them shop while you shop with your own list. Meet at a central location before going to the register.
- Cleaning out refrigerator
- Caring for and teaching young siblings/neighbors
- Planning and preparing more complicated meals
- Cleaning the entire house with you

“It is never too early or too late to teach children how to contribute and problem solve under their own power. Despite the protest to the contrary, kids want to play a useful role in the family's success. Do not swoop in and rescue them” - Jessica Lahey

PERMISSION TO MAKE MISTAKES

I, (THE ARTIST), HERBY ACKNOWLEDGE
THAT ON OCCASSION IT IS COMPLETELY NORMAL/HUMAN/EXPECTED
THAT MISTAKES OCCUR, AND THAT WHEN THEY HAPPEN I WILL NOT
SPEND AN EXORBANANT AMOUNT OF TIME BEATING MYSELF UP.OVER
IT. I UNDERSTAND THAT I HAVE FULL PERMISSION AND AM EXPECTED
TO MAKE MISTAKES ON A REGULAR BASIS.

SIGNED

DATED