

## *Family Tapestries* Strengthening Family Bonds



### Fact Sheet

# Helping Children Achieve Success and Learn from Failure

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As children grow and develop, they experience many successes and failures. In today's competitive world, children are constantly evaluating their performance whether at school or in the extracurricular activities in which they participate. But what is the effect of failure on a child's development? Do children react negatively to not being able to do something very well or actually failing to do it at all? How do children learn about success and failure?

## Infants and Toddlers

Infants enjoy learning new skills. They are not afraid to try something new. If they accomplish something new, they may repeat the behavior because it is fun, and this enjoyment often encourages them to try other new tasks.

Toddlers often look to adults to evaluate their behavior and skills. Because at this age children do not have the ability to cognitively know why they have had successes or what they can do to succeed the next time, parents and adults have an important role to play. Parents and adults can evaluate what a toddler does and communicate to the toddler what they think of his or her behavior. An example is watching a toddler learn to walk. The parent stands with outstretched arms encouraging the toddler to come to the parent. As the child takes those first shaky steps, the parent smiles and tells the child, "You can do it." If the child falls, the parent picks the child up and encourages the toddler to try again. If the toddler is successful, hugs and kisses may follow.

Through words of encouragement and gentle touches, the toddler knows he or she has pleased the parent and tries again.

## Preschoolers

By age three to four, they are better able to evaluate what they have done in terms of success and failure. Based on what the child has learned, through trial and error, he or she will often know what to try to be successful in the future.

A child's belief that he or she can be successful is important for success to occur. Encouragement from adults is important as children learn new tasks and skills. Some children, however, will give up when faced with a challenge, believing they are not able to do the task. A parent can help by encouraging them to try new tasks and praising the child for trying something that is difficult. It is important to love the child unconditionally and not link love of the child to the child's ability to perform a task.

## School-Age Children

School-age children see their ability to achieve as related to their own abilities and talents. If for some reason the child is not successful, the child will often look for what can be done to change the outcome. They do not give up, but keep trying. During these years, they also begin to learn to manage some of the negative emotions that may influence their feelings about themselves. Parents can help the middle school child look at his or her interests and strengths and

encourage activities that will showcase the child's talents and interests. As the child experiences success, his or her self-esteem will improve.

Some children believe their lack of success is related to their lack of ability. If they do succeed, they believe it is because of chance or luck, not because of what they have done. They do not equate their ability to be successful with something they have control over. So if the task is difficult, they feel they have no control and give up, before even trying. These children seek positive evaluation from adults because they have a hard time believing in their ability to achieve success. Parents can help by teaching children how to evaluate their actions in terms of their own skills and abilities. Children will need to practice the process of evaluating why they may not have been successful and what steps can be implemented to improve performance.

## Adolescents

By the time a child reaches high school, he or she understands how important it is to try and to not give up. By this age they realize that two people with different levels of ability can achieve the same thing. Teenagers are also able to evaluate their own performance and not rely solely on the opinion of others.

## What Parents Can Do

Parents can play a very important role in helping children deal with success and failure. Here are some guidelines for parents to follow.

- Love your child unconditionally. Make sure that your child knows that you love him or her regardless of how he or she does. Do not ever tie your love for your child to success or failure in accomplishing a task.
- Develop an understanding of what your child is developmentally capable of achieving. Learn more about child development and what children at different ages are able to accomplish.
- Have realistic expectations concerning your child's performance. Parents should not set unusually high or low standards. Know what your child

is capable of achieving and set goals based on what is appropriate for your child.

- Provide guidance for your child. Children need to know that success and failures are a part of life. Knowing how to get back up and try again after a failure is an important lesson.
  - Celebrate and discuss successes. Help your child see what he or she has done to enable a particular success.
  - Be a role model for your child. Let your child observe you experiencing successes and failures. Through these observations your child will learn how you handle the emotions that accompany success and failure.
  - Provide an environment at home that has some structure and order. Structure and organization help children learn that life goes on after things have not gone well. The daily routine can be both comforting and reassuring.
  - Help your child learn to deal with his or her emotions. Children may experience joy, pride, guilt, shame, sadness, or a host of other emotions. Children need to talk about their feelings and emotions. Parents can help children learn how to express their emotions in a socially acceptable way.
  - Help your child to develop positive social relationships that can provide support when things go wrong. Other caring adults and friends can also provide guidance and direction in a child's life. They can serve as role models. Your child can observe how they respond to success and failure.
- In conclusion, children learn about success and failure as they grow and develop. Parents can help children learn more about how to cope with both success and failure by providing guidance, support, and love.

## References

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