

HOW TO DEAL WITH FAILURE

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Whoever said there is no such thing as failure has lost touch with the planet earth! Of course there is such a thing as failure. It is in the dictionary and it means 'non-performance of something due or expected'. You can't gloss over the word and call it something else just because society thinks it is a dirty word. To refuse to accept the word 'failure' is senseless and a product of our indulgent culture. It just means we are not allowing ourselves to learn from the experience or to teach our children how to deal with not meeting expectations – whatever they are.

When we were in high school in New Zealand we had to pass a State-wide exam. Only 50% could pass so that meant an automatic 50% failure rate. It made us work very hard and we all knew that if we didn't make it, we had to repeat the whole year again. I repeated the year! My husband, Brian, repeated a year. His two brothers repeated a year. This is reality – the real world. It didn't really hurt us although of course we were very disappointed in our own performances. It dented our pride and we wasted a year that we could have been earning.

If we don't learn early that there are consequences for not meeting expectations, then we will never make it in the adult work world. We will always be making excuses that it was someone else's fault. No it isn't. We put in the hard yards and enjoy the results. Brian, his brothers and I became university graduates and we would not have had so great a resolve to succeed had we not learned through failure in early exams.

Now, there are times when we have little choice over whether we win or lose. We can train vigorously for a race, but we cannot guarantee we will be the winner. It is wrong for parents to give kids the message that if you are not the winner, you are a failure. That is NOT true. We should not compare ourselves with others, but compare ourselves against our own performance. If we are beating our own times, then we are achieving.

How do we teach our kids to handle failure? Acknowledge that there is such a word. Teach them that doing their best is what counts, not just trying to be better than someone else. We can control our own performance most of the time, but others are an unknown quantity. Be an effective role model. When you try something and it doesn't work out, talk the experience over with your kids.

Acknowledge your disappointment, but show them how failing this time doesn't mean failing every time. Show your kids how you learn from the experience and what you are going to do to improve your chances for next time. Encourage your kids to expect great things of themselves. Celebrate success but also celebrate effort.

Everyone in the world will have a story of failure. Some use failure as a sentence of doom, while others, like us, say, "I am not going to let this beat me, I will show them!" and rise to it. How do you see it?

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.