**Difficult Conversations: Have you taught your child to fail yet?**

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Most people I meet root for their child to succeed in everything. They want a poster child who not only excels in academics, but also dances, sings, is a sports star and a perfect orator. There is no room for failure. The parent holds the child’s hand throughout; making sure that failure never so much as touches the child. They wake at 3 am to make sure that the child is studying, hover over them to make sure each second is productively used, and micromanage their lives.

In our endeavour to ensure success or protect our children from the harsh realities, we are however, doing them a great disservice. We think that we are protecting them, their self-esteem, and ultimately their future. Ironically, there is a rich body of research out there that recommends a little bit of disappointment and a dose of failure as a means of teaching the child resilience, patience and other skills essential in ultimately realizing their full potential.

But then how do we prepare a child for failure? We can’t sabotage their efforts to make sure that they fail! These are some of things that work:

**Praise effort**

Every time we go overboard celebrating the child’s success, we are also telling them that they are valued as much as their success. So a balance is needed here. More than the end result, praise the effort that the child put in. If the child can learn to recognize his own hard work, gauge it and appreciate the process more than the result, we already have a winner at hand.

**Empathize**

Sometimes, to make them feel better we say things like, “It was just a test. There are bigger things in store”. Or that “you will do better next time”. These are statements left best to another day. Right now, the child needs the parent to understand their devastation, the feeling of worthlessness. Recognize the child’s pain. Say something like, “I can see that you are hurt and you really wanted to do better.” Or “I am here. I know how it feels.” Basically, in order to help the children, we have to be better listeners first. And even better hug-dispensers.

**Mistakes are acceptable companions**

Mistakes are nature’s best teachers. A child who hasn’t mixed up all paints to make a dirty brown will never discover new shades. One learns from their mistakes. We were okay with letting a baby touch a hot mug so that she learns to keep away from everything hot. That instinct got lost somewhere as the child started school. We look at mistakes as things that take success away when all they do is open new doors to success. We need to take the taboo away from errors. A better idea is to accept them and then discuss ways to deal with them with the child.

**Reassess your own definition of success**

I have seen parents fight with teachers during PTMs over half a mark. That half a mark stood between the child and his success, his first rank. That half a mark also stood between the child and his coping mechanism. Ask yourself, what is it that you want out of your child’s success? How important is it in the larger picture? Will academic success compensate for a strong character? Will it lead to happiness? Once you have reflected upon it, you are likely to find that our need for the child’s success is rooted in our own needs, aspirations and ideas of success. It is time to recognize what we truly want the future to hold for our child. We want their paths to lead to happiness. So for the child to enjoy that journey, we need to take the burden of our own ambitions off their backs.

**Be a guide**

Guides just need to guide, not ensure results. We are guides. As Parents, we can show them the way, but we must not guarantee destination. That is theirs to find. A parent has to be the guide who encourages the child to look for solutions when presented with a problem. Some of the solutions could be ridiculous, but be patient. Let the child come to the conclusion themselves. By just giving them this room to think and fly, we are helping them develop reasoning, creative thinking and analytical ability.

In order to fight these statistics we need to take the blinkers off. We need to stop chasing success mindlessly. We need to wish failure upon kids sometimes! For that is how they will learn. We need to take a step back and resist the urge to make everything a cakewalk for them. We need to fight our instinct to drive the kids harder than they can bear. We need to stop giving them our best and expecting them to give us theirs. Rather than giving them the best, as parents we need to give them the strength to deal with the worst. The strength will be their true success.