

Dear Parent

We are forwarding an article we came across online. Its an interesting and thought provoking read. There are no established rules for good parenting and we advocate none as being the only option. Just read for pleasure and if you find something of value, you are welcome to consider.

### **“TEACHING CHILDREN TO FAIL**

**I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.**

**– Thomas A. Edison**

How do we measure ‘good parenting?’ What yardstick do we use to say, ‘that’s a really good parent!’ The number of trophies they bring home? The A’s on their report cards? 350 marks? How well-behaved they are? How articulate they are?

What, really, is the measure of a good parent?

I came across a phrase that really resonated with where I am as a parent, “If parenthood came with a GPS, it would mostly say: RECALCULATING.” That’s how it feels like everyday to me. Parenting is sneaky. At one point, you really think you got it covered. Other times, you find yourself questioning even your most basic move. Parenting, to me, is a journey of growth, in which you discover more about yourself than about your children. It is a journey wrought with pleasant and sometimes not-so-pleasant surprises along the way.

As a parent. Learning. Never. Ever. EVER. Stops.

So. I experienced one of those ‘GPS re-calculating’ moments the other day, when I went to pick my son from school. He had stayed late for Tae kwon do practice. I was a few minutes early, so I sat next to this distinguished looking elderly lady, who had a disarming smile and an enviable air of calm about her. Within minutes, we were chatting up about our ‘amazing’ children, and the Tae kwon do tournament that had just ended the previous weekend. My son had done pretty well, and I was still riding on the high of that victory.

I was feeling like a pretty good parent.

Just as I was about to launch into a long discourse about how incredibly well he had done, she remarked, rather casually, “my grandson was disqualified in the first round.” Startled (and a little ashamed of myself), I turned to look at her. She had this serene look on her face, her eyes full of love and admiration. “Well,” she went on with a smile, “the next tournament is coming up next month, and I know he will give it his best shot.”

Suffice it to say, my discourse on my son’s performance came to a grinding halt.

- You see, many times when I have that look of love and admiration on my face, it is when my son has done pretty, pretty well. Her quiet admission, stated with such confidence and finality, sent my parenthood GPS whizzing back to ‘recalculation’ mode. In her wisdom, probably spanning over years of failures and victories, this beautiful grandma knew that her 7 year old’s stint in Tae kwon do was just the start of many failures, and many victories that will prepare him for life. To her, this was a very small and necessary part of the journey of her grandson’s life.

To me, my son’s ‘amazing’ performance was THE measure of my great parenting.

Well, they say that we teach what we need to learn most. So, here I am. The one thing that I learned from that encounter was this – I want to teach my son about the beauty of FAILURE.

I would like my son to experience as many opportunities as he needs to fail, in order for him to succeed.

Not a very easy feat, in this competitive, trophy-laden culture.

A culture where we are so sensitive about not 'damaging' our kids, that we insist on 'trophysizing' everything they do. Gee! My son has a bigger collection of medals and little trophies that he has collected over his short 7 years, than my decades of toiling and sweating through several 'higher' institutions of learning!

In this culture, we have come to define success as 'the avoidance of failure at all costs'. And that is what we are passing on to our children.

In our mistaken definition of a 'good parent', we have embraced this notion that good parenting is equal to protecting our children from all harm, including – heaven forbid -the slim possibility that they might fail. By not allowing our children to fail, we are failing our children. By shielding them from temporary pain, we are making them permanent quitters. We seem to have forgotten that without struggle, there can be never be any progress. That our children need to go through embarrassing moments, so they can develop the gift of empathy.

We need to let our children fail, so that they can succeed. How?

Let them go back to school with unfinished assignments, because you will not remind them to do their homework.

Let them show up in school without their homework books and face the consequences, because you are done putting their books back in their bags for them.

Let them (and you too!) live with the discomfort of a smelly room until they figure where that smell is coming from, and clean out the left-over pizza they 'forgot'.

Let them come home after a long tiring trip, and find their rooms as messy as they left them.

Let them carry to school that weird looking project that took them the whole weekend to put together – a box-house whose walls keep caving in – because, like my grandma friend says, it is not the end result, but the effort, that counts. And because next time they will try harder to make their project more perfect and learn great lessons in the process.

Oh! And this is a hard one for me. Let them go back to school with sentences that are wrongly constructed and wrongly spelt! (I need to remember that I'm not the one being tested... Sigh).

Let them color outside the lines.

Let them write the D with the 'stomach' facing up.

You see, teachers have gone through specialized training to help the kids in a systematic way to learn how to write a D. And to color within the lines. Training which you haven't been through. Let the teacher do their work, so you can in turn do your job as a parent.

And this one is for mums – let your children fall off their bikes – it is the only way they will learn!

And for the daddies. Go easy on your kids. Let them know failure is acceptable.

Why? Because – the greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

Your job as a good parent is to walk with them. Not over failure. Not around failure. But through their failure. To the other end."

**Happy Thinking !**

Regards

  
Principal