

# RAISING CHILDREN WITH SELF-EFFICACY

by Kristin MacDermott & Jocelyn Baker

Children who have self-efficacy believe they are capable of exerting some control over their lives. They believe they can act on their own behalf to have positive outcomes. They take personal responsibility for their lives.

People with self-efficacy don't have the victim-mentality. Even when things are difficult, they look to what they can control and focus on making positive impacts in their own lives.

Self-efficacy is one of the pillars of resilience because we are all going to face hardships. Divorce, job loss, financial problems, illnesses, breakups ... these are all part of life. But if we use these hardships to grow, if we use the hardship advantage, we become stronger because we look to what we can control, we extract the lessons, and we become better versions of ourselves in the face of hardship.

When children do not have self-efficacy, the world happens to them. They are at the mercy of circumstance. When facing a challenge, they focus on everything that is outside of their control, which makes the challenge seem insurmountable. They are defeated before they even begin.

But when children have self-efficacy, they thrive in spite of the chaos around them. When faced with an obstacle, they focus on taking care of themselves, getting their needs met, and doing what's in their control. They use disappointment to clarify what they want, and they believe in their ability to learn and adapt.

So how do we help our children build self-efficacy?

We have to give them evidence that they have some control over the outcomes in their lives. They have to have experience connecting the dots between their actions and the outcomes they experience.

One of the most important ways to do this is by transferring responsibility as early and as often as possible, in age-appropriate ways. Here's what we mean by transferring responsibility: Let your children take the reins sometimes. When it is appropriate to do so, let your children be in charge of decisions, of outcomes, and of the mistakes they make.

This can be really hard, but it helps if you teach your children the Failure Recovery Formula. (See the next page.)

Often, when something goes wrong, the parents want to fix it. When children are unhappy we feel like we are failing them and that it's our responsibility to make things right.

This makes sense. After all, when our children were babies, they depended on us for everything. If they were upset, it was our job to figure out why and to fix it. Early on, we developed a habit of fixing things for our kids.

But consider this, as our children grow, they need to rely on us less and less so that they can rely on themselves more and more. This is a requirement of independence.

It's also critical to self-efficacy. If your children do not have any experience taking care of their own problems, how will they feel empowered when they are faced with future obstacles? If they have never taken responsibility in the past, they probably won't know how to do it in the future. They probably won't immediately think: *Well, what can I do to take care of myself in this situation.* Instead, they will sit back and wait for someone else to take care of them.

So use the Failure Recovery Formula and help them learn how to handle their own mistakes now. Each time something goes wrong in your child's life, they have an opportunity to build their self-efficacy skills.

*because everyone makes mistakes from time to time*

# THE FAILURE RECOVERY FORMULA



## ACKNOWLEDGE IT

Instead of passing the buck or being defensive, simply acknowledge the mistake without adding any excuses.

- "I did not do my homework."
- "I forgot my gym bag."
- "I said something unkind to you."



## APOLOGIZE

The important part of apologizing is that you do not add any excuses. "I'm sorry," followed by the word "but" is not an apology, it's an excuse.

Instead, try something like:

"I am sorry for making this mistake."



## LISTEN

Let the other person (in this case, the teacher, coach, or friend) say what they have to say. Try not to defend yourself or make excuses. Just listen to the other person's perspective.



## VALIDATE

Show that you understand the other person's point by repeating what they said.

- "You are worried I will fail."
- "It hurts the entire team when I can't participate because I was forgetful."
- "You don't feel like you can trust me."



## PROPOSE A PLAN

Propose a solution.

- "Should I do my homework at recess?"
- "Should I clean the gym equipment?"
- "I imagine you are mad. Should I give you some space?"



## HAVE A GOOD ATTITUDE

Pouting, moping, or snapping at people won't help you earn forgiveness or trust. In the aftermath of a mistake, be kind, humble, and helpful.