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PARENTING The right to failure

■ Kids need a chance to fail as part of their development, says an author and expert on parenting.

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- Rob Kruyt, 24 hours

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Learning to lose

Failure is an opportunity for kids to grow

When my son fits the square block in the square hole I cheer as if he's my little mini Michael Phelps. And when he tries to put the same shape in the round hole, and it bounces unsuccessfully to the floor, I still clap over-enthusiastically along with him.

Why? Well, because I love him. I want to protect him. And don't want him to feel bad because he failed.

But according to Gina Mollicone-Long, author of *The Secret of Successful Failing*, I may be setting him up for an even bigger fall.

"Creating a failure-less environment does not do anyone any good because the real world is not failure-less." Schools in particular, despite their best intentions, are at fault, she says.

"They don't fail kids in school any more. I understand there's social implications of holding a 10 year old back with seven year olds, but ... these kids are moving on without the skills," she says.

Even worse, she says, is they don't have the reading and writing skills, or the coping skills for dealing with disappointment.

Failure is an opportunity to learn and grow, says Mollicone-Long. And by not letting kids experience it we're stunting their growth. Take growing pains, she says. Muscles stretch and it hurts. But do we keep kids four feet tall forever to spare them that pain?

And the trend towards abolishing First, Second and Third place at track meets, passing out participation ribbons instead, isn't doing kids any favours either, says Mollicone-Long.

"We're negating the failure in the hopes that the kids who fail won't feel bad," she says. But what about "the kids who succeed – who are champions? We're doing them a disservice by playing down their greatness," she says.

Instead of sweeping failure under the carpet, Mollicone-Long advises how to handle it when kids comes in 5th – or 35th – place.

Don't placate them with, 'But you're a champion to me, honey,' she says. Albeit true, it's not authentic, she says.

"Refocus your kid. Ask them: What is your talent? Where are you a champion? And then you celebrate that."

Mollicone-Long has her seven year old list all the things she's good at. And for extra reinforcement she has pictures of her daughter excelling at her strengths (running a marathon or skiing) scattered throughout her bedroom.

"When she's feeling down I say, 'But look at all the things that you do.' I'm teaching her, when you fall down you can either focus on falling down or you can focus on the opposite of what you believe to be true in that moment."

No one wants to be the pushy parent who demands perfection from our kids, but it's not okay to request mediocrity instead, she says.

When they fall down – which they will – we need to teach them to pick themselves up again, not to set the bar lower next time so they won't be disappointed.

After all, the saying is: If you shoot for the stars you just might get to the moon, says Mollicone-Long. Not, "don't really reach higher than that tree over there because if you do, you might not reach it. And that sucks, and we don't want it to suck for you."

Find out more about Gina Mollicone-Long's Secret of Successful Failing School Program at www.ginamollicone-long.com

- Carly Krug, 24 hours



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