



## ***The Gift of Failure by Jessica Lahey***

### **Think you might want to read this book?**

Jessica Lahey gives every parent in the world reason to calm down and disengage from helicopter or snowplow parenting. She cites research, her own experience, surveys and anecdotal relays from friends to convince us that as a general rule parents today need to sit back and observe more and interfere less. In what could be a sister book to [\*The Blessing of a Skinned Knee\*](#), [\*The Gift of Failure\*](#)

reassures us that the real lessons in life are the ones that are personal, determined by our own decisions, and force us to look in the mirror and take aim at who we are and want to be. Perhaps the best litmus test takeaway is the idea of “autonomy-supportive parenting.” If you run every decision through the lens of whether or not a particular decision would support the autonomy of your child in the long-run then we would all probably make better decisions with regards to raising our children.

### **What would Socrates ask?**

- If we value a student who can think critically, has original ideas, and is happy to innovate more than one without those traits but has straight A's... how do we change the educational system to foster them?
- What would be the impact if we incorporated a child's happiness into parent conferences, comments home, and discussions with our students and families?
- What if parents viewed teachers like we do in healthy relationships with referees- people who make decisions about how things play out and our children need to learn to roll with what happens?
- What if students always had a goal set- academic, extracurricular, or social- and we checked in on that goal every two weeks?
- What would be the effect if we all used “autonomy-supportive parenting” as the phrase to mean giving children the space to succeed or fail on their own?

### **Research**

- Children whose parents don't allow them to fail are *less* engaged, *less* enthusiastic about their education, *less* motivated, and ultimately *less* successful than children whose parents support their autonomy.
- By a whopping 40%, peer play is significantly more predictive of academic success than standardized achievement tests. Free play, and the social interaction that it fosters, are undervalued in our children's social and emotional growth.
- Smooth sailing isn't where deep learning happens.
- ... decades of research shows that positive family-school relationships are vital to student success. Positive parent-teacher partnerships don't just benefit students; they are a boon to everyone involved.

- In terms of homework, the National Parent-Teacher Association recommends 10-20 minutes per night in first grade and an additional 10 minutes per grade level thereafter.

### **Concepts**

- “Autonomy-supportive parenting”- giving children the time and space to allow them to succeed or fail based on the effects of their own decisions.
- “Pressured Parents Phenomenon”- The anxiety parents feel around ever-increasing competition with others so that *our* children have all the advantages and receive all the recognition possible.

### **Quotes from the author**

- Out of love and desire to protect our children’s self-esteem, we have bulldozed every uncomfortable bump and obstacle out of their way, clearing the manicured path we hoped would lead to success and happiness. Unfortunately in doing so we have deprived our children of the most important lessons of childhood.
- The setbacks, mistakes, miscalculations, and failures we have shoved out of our children's way are the very experiences that teach them how to be resourceful, persistent, innovative, and resilient citizens of the world.
- In order to raise healthy, happy kids who can begin to build their own adulthood separate from us we are going to have to extricate our egos from our children's lives and allow them to feel the pride of their own accomplishments as well as the pain of their own failures.
- So what is a parent to do if we can't bribe, supervise, or impose goals or deadlines? Believe it or not, the answer, no matter how counterintuitive it might feel, is to back off.
- Protecting kids from the frustration, anxiety, and sadness they experience from failure in the short-term keeps our children from becoming resilient and from experiencing the growth mindset they deserve.
- When a teacher reports that something is going on with your child, at least consider that the teacher might be right. Rejecting teacher observations out of hand is a common defensive move, one I have fallen for myself, but it damages relationships and delays the opportunity for academic, psychological, or medical help for a student.
- ... at some point during your child’s education, he will be assigned teachers he doesn't like. There will be teachers he doesn't know how to talk to, teachers who are exceptionally demanding, teachers he doesn't completely understand, and teachers whose expectations are unclear. This, dear parents, is a good thing. These teachers will be the people who will teach your child how to deal with the many challenging, unpleasant, contrary, and demanding people he will encounter over the course of his life.

### **Quotes from others**

- “The cost of over-protecting is that the child does not develop the skills to fight back, speak up or get the hell out of the way. If a child is taught by their parents that an adult will swoop in and fight for them or save them from any form of challenging situation, that child will keep expecting that to happen and not look for solutions to help herself. That

child will also not learn valuable communication skills that are necessary during the heat of emotional flooding during an argument.”

- Andrea Nair- Psychotherapist and parenting coach

- “Homework overload is the exception rather than the norm... the majority of U.S. students spend less than an hour a day on homework, regardless of grade level, and this is held true for most of the past 50 years.”

- National Education Association’s “Research Spotlight on Homework”

**Implement tomorrow?**

- Use the lens of “autonomy-supportive parenting”- giving children the time and space to allow them to succeed or fail based on the effects of their own decisions.

**Gateways to further learning**

- [Failing Your Way to Success](#)
- [Teaching Strategies: Let Students Learn From Failure](#)
- [Helping Students Fail: A Framework](#)
- [How to Help Kids Learn to Fail](#)

**Referenced books with the potential to impact leading and learning in education**

Author(s) Last Name	Title
Pink	<a href="#"><i>Drive</i></a>
Gross-Loh	<a href="#"><i>Parenting Without Borders</i></a>
Harris	<a href="#"><i>The Nurture Assumption</i></a>
Weissbourd	<a href="#"><i>The Parents We Mean to Be</i></a>
Wyma	<a href="#"><i>Cleaning House</i></a>

The applicability of this book to leading and/or learning is ....



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