



The Art of Failure



Life is a series of choices. Each day consists of us needing to make choices that will have an impact on the rest of that day and the people around us, but it goes without saying that we don't always get it right. The key, however, is how we handle ourselves when we make the wrong choice. I work with children as part of my job and whilst I am there to impart a range of skills and knowledge over many subjects, I am more importantly there to help equip children with the skills and

understanding that they will need as they grow up within society. I take this role seriously as I only have such a short period of time to have a positive influence on those I teach.

One of the many areas that I face on a regular basis, is the ability to deal with getting something wrong. Each individual child is of course different, but I can guarantee that within a class there will be a group of children who really struggle when they get something wrong. A research project years ago revealed that boys can have a tendency to achieve better than girls in maths at an early age, not because of ability, but simply due to the fact that girls didn't like the fact that in maths you're either right or you're wrong. Many boys at a young age are happy to build towers and then knock them over almost immediately, whereas girls often play games in which everything has to look and be 'just right'. Therefore, girls' confidence levels often dropped in maths as they feared not being right and as a result they underachieved. This is something I have seen time and time again in my teaching and every year I have the same conversations with a small group of girls in which I have to teach them that it's ok to not know the answer or to get it wrong. I take time to work closely alongside them in handling the emotions that arise when an answer is incorrect and to learn that it's ok to get something wrong. In the end, the confidence grows and they perform just as well as their peers.

It's always good to see a healthy amount of competitiveness within the children I work with, but this can, at times, overstep the healthy mark and become more about a fear of being wrong. At work we have a system of marking in which the children are supposed to correct their incorrect answers by writing the correct answer next to the incorrect answer. However, I still have children who insist on rubbing out the wrong answer, replacing it with the correct answer and presenting their book as if the incorrect answer never happened. This is something that I tackle head on with the children and won't let them get away with it. The ability to be able to go back, learn from their mistake and correct it, is what is key.

So many times I see situations where children are protected or excused from mistakes they've made or where they're always allowed to win the game, but it is so important that they learn to make mistakes and learn how to handle not succeeding at something. Even at an early age, children can quickly measure their self-worth and value against their successes and, if this isn't addressed during childhood, this pattern can follow us through our adult life. We can see making mistakes as a reflection of our ability and worth. The truth of the matter is that our worth is not determined by how often we get it right but whether we value ourselves enough to learn and move on from those mistakes. I'm sure we can all think of times where we've made mistakes but have come up with reasons or excuses as to why it wasn't our fault. We've simply refused to take responsibility for our choices. Growth comes where we take responsibility for our mistakes, put things right with those around us, and then determine to learn and grow from these mistakes so that the next time we can avoid the same route. Making mistakes is a natural part of life and so the sooner that we settle that within ourselves, the sooner we'll stop being so hard on ourselves when we make those mistakes. Mistakes aren't a sign of weakness; refusing to take responsibility for them, and to learn from them on the other hand, is.

Jen