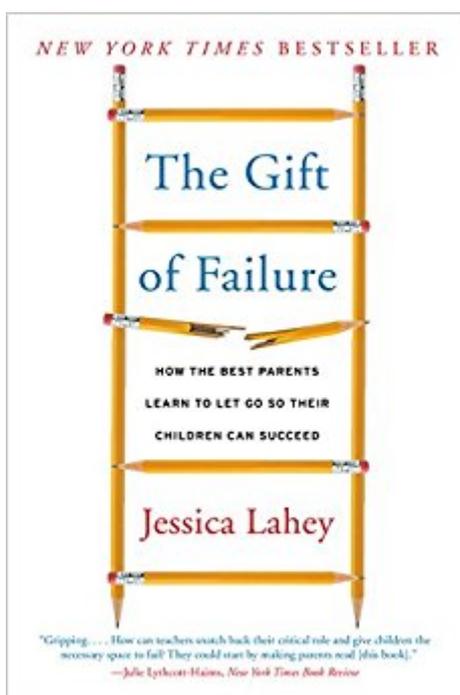


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# The Gift Of Failure: How The Best Parents Learn To Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed



## Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES #1 BESTSELLER In the tradition of Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed* and Wendy Mogel's *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, this groundbreaking manifesto focuses on the critical school years when parents must learn to allow their children to experience the disappointment and frustration that occur from life's inevitable problems so that they can grow up to be successful, resilient, and self-reliant adults. Modern parenting is defined by an unprecedented level of overprotectiveness: parents who rush to school at the whim of a phone call to deliver forgotten assignments, who challenge teachers on report card disappointments, mastermind children's friendships, and interfere on the playing field. As teacher and writer Jessica Lahey explains, even though these parents see themselves as being highly responsive to their children's well being, they aren't giving them the chance to experience failure or the opportunity to learn to solve their own problems. Overparenting has the potential to ruin a child's confidence and undermine their education, Lahey reminds us. Teachers don't just teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. They teach responsibility, organization, manners, restraint, and foresight—important life skills children carry with them long after they leave the classroom. Providing a path toward solutions, Lahey lays out a blueprint with targeted advice for handling homework, report cards, social dynamics, and sports. Most importantly, she sets forth a plan to help parents learn to step back and embrace their children's failures. Hard-hitting yet warm and wise, *The Gift of Failure* is essential reading for parents, educators, and psychologists nationwide who want to help children succeed.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Instead of lecturing us about what we’re doing wrong, Jessica Lahey reveals what she did wrong with her own children and students and how she systematically reformed her ways. A refreshing, practical book for parents who want to raise resilient kids but aren’t sure how to start.” (Amanda Ripley, author of *The Smartest Kids in the World*) “This fascinating, thought-provoking book shows that to help children succeed, we must allow them to fail. Essential reading for parents, teachers, coaches, psychologists, and anyone else who wants to guide children towards lives of independence, creativity, and courage.” (Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*) “It’s hard to overstate the importance of this book. *The Gift of Failure* is beautifully written; it’s deeply researched; but most of all it’s the one book we all need to read if we want to instill the next generation with confidence and joy.” (Susan Cain, author of *Quiet*) “Lahey offers one of the most important parenting messages of our times: Unless we allow our children to learn how to take on challenges, they won’t thrive in school and in life. Her extremely helpful book tells her story, compiles research, and provides hundreds of doable suggestions.” (Ellen Galinsky, author of *Mind in the Making*) “How can we help our children grow to be resourceful, happy adults? Lahey shows in practical terms how to know what your child is ready for and how to offer support even as you encourage autonomy. A wise, engaging book, steeped in scientific research and tempered with common sense.” (Daniel T. Willingham, PhD, author of *Why Don’t Students Like School?*) “Through an artful combination of anecdote and research, Lahey delivers a lesson that moms and dads badly need to learn: that failure is vital to children’s success. Any parent who pines for a saner, more informed approach to child-rearing should read this book.” (Jennifer Senior, author of *All Joy and No Fun*) “Lahey has many wise and helpful words...ones that any parent can and should embrace.” (Publishers Weekly)

Modern parenting is defined by an unprecedented level of overprotectiveness: parents now rush to school to deliver forgotten assignments, challenge teachers on report card disappointments, mastermind children’s friendships, and interfere on the playing field. As teacher, journalist, and parent Jessica Lahey explains, even though these parents see themselves as being highly responsive to their children’s well-being, they aren’t giving them the chance to experience failure or the opportunity to learn to solve their own problems. Everywhere she turned, Lahey saw an obvious and startling fear of failure in both her students and her own children. This fear has the potential to undermine children’s autonomy, competence,

motivation, and their relationships with the adults in their lives. Providing a clear path toward solutions, Lahey lays out a blueprint with targeted advice for handling homework, report cards, social dynamics, and sports. Most important, she sets forth a plan to help parents learn to step back and embrace their children's setbacks along with their success.

Very useful and practical advice about trusting and guiding your child to find intrinsic motivation without being controlling and micromanaging as a parent. This book doesn't say it's easy. In fact, it can be a stressful and angst-ridden journey, especially when setbacks, disappointment, and failure are part of the overall experience. What's balanced about this book is that it doesn't advocate disengagement. It even provides scenarios when parental intervention is necessary, but it gives a balanced view of the ups and downs of any child's/teen's life that he or she has to experience, negotiate, and resolve on their own with you standing by with support and understanding. Will it change the attitudes of people who are fixated on grades and rewards as an indication of their child's success and ability to get into the best colleges? Probably not, but this book argues for focusing on the skills and traits that will make for a successful human being regardless of what those early grades would seem to indicate. Many practical subjects covered in this book, including how to help your child get himself organized, skills (for both parents and kids) dealing with difficult situations and people, how to avoid demotivating practices, the teenage brain and improving working memory, as well as an interesting discussion about the value of grading, which many readers may or may not agree with.

This book had a profound effect on my thinking about how to be a parent. I don't think of myself as the type who hovers, but I'm starting to understand that I hover more than I realize. It's not that the author is advocating for hands-off parenting. Instead, she points out a lot of the ways in which parents take the reins and deny their kids all sense of control, and how detrimental that can be. We want our kids to grow up to be responsible and capable adults, but how can they do that when we take away their sense of autonomy? This book made me realize it's more important for me to teach my kids life skills like how to manage their time than it is for me to be managing every detail. My doing so comes from good intentions and a desire to see them succeed, but at the same time it conveys subtle messages to them I don't want conveyed. I read a lot of psychology and social science books because the research just plain fascinates me. While this book offers a lot of anecdotes, it's also infused with an excellent grasp of research. Lahey's background in education shines through, and her suggestions are grounded in the same evidence-based research that I've

read. If kids seem different today, it's because they are, and it's not just technology that's driving this change, it's the way parents treat their children and how they view them. We want them to be successful, but in our test-driven, high achieving culture, we are sometimes guilty of emphasizing the wrong things. After reading a great deal about helpless college students, children suffering from stress-related ills, and the mental health problems plaguing universities, this book helped me form an idea as to why this may be: rather than teaching our children to work for the things they want, we're setting them on a prescribed path and sending them the message that they're only okay as long as they follow that prescribed path. Reading this book makes the mystifying question of why children don't want to take risks quite clear: because we've taught them that there's nothing worse than failure. Yet this book doesn't just discuss research, it also offers a lot of practical solutions for parents. Fair warning, though: not all of these suggestions are easy to swallow. This is where some of the pain came in for me, because I saw myself reflected in some of the behaviors Lahey suggests parents need to break. Giving her suggestions a try isn't going to be easy from a parenting standpoint, and it will require me to retrain myself as well. I also think there's a lot of value in how this book offers some very good insight into the educational system, which I think is a big benefit to parents who don't come from a teaching background. Lahey proposes that parents and teachers work as partners, and she offers suggestions for how parents can open up dialog with their kids' teachers. Considering how adversarial our current culture and politics paint the relationship between educators and parents, there is a great deal of value in this aspect of the book. It doesn't serve anyone for parents and teachers to be at one another's throats, not when both sides want the same thing. This book offers constructive ways parents can form that partnership with teachers, so that everyone can work together toward the same goal. I highly recommend this book to both parents and educators.

Wow, every parent ought to read this book. Failing is a part of life and without it, our kids can't learn the skills they need. So relevant to most parents today. Thanks for writing it.

Overall the premise of *The Gift of Failure* is a good one. In a hypercompetitive, hovering parents need to step back and expect more from their kids. Parents need to rethink the idea that attentive, caring parenting means swooping in to micromanage every detail of their kids' lives. While this book is light hearted and well meaning, it is oversimplified and short on practical advice for actual real-life scenarios. Just tell your child what you expect, back off and, after a period of minor frustration, it will all work out! But we never find out how to deal with

a kid who couldn't care less what your expectations are, ignores the chore chart on the fridge or who never learns from his failures. It is important to remember that the author's experiences working at elite private and Ivy League college town public schools inform her ideas on areas where parents should step back because these schools are already on it. Her descriptions of supervised study halls and supervised weekly notebook and locker cleanouts are certainly not routine at my kids' public schools. And her suggestion to stay out of the college search process is laughable, unless you are at a school like hers where everyone goes to an elite private college with the means to pay for it and students are closely shepherded through the search and admissions process by professional college counselors. At my kids' school, college counseling amounts to "Most kids seem to like State U, why don't you apply there?" Same for her advice on letting your kids dabble in different languages instead of sticking with the one they started in 6th grade - this autonomy seems great until you are paying college tuition to fulfill a language requirement they could have fulfilled for free in high school. But they can count to ten in French, Latin, Mandarin and American Sign Language! The author's one size fits all approach is problematic as well - what most kids should be able to handle in high school some may not, for example, my kid with ADD who does well in school but has extraordinary difficulty staying organized and managing his time. For maturity/brain development reasons, executive functions may not kick in with these kids until they are in their early twenties. I do believe that competitive parenting needs a break and this book will help. I remember being in the soccer field parking lot and watching a mom put socks and shin guards on her nine year old daughter while the daughter sat passively in the minivan, drinking a juice box and reading a book. This mom probably thought she was the best, most attentive mom ever, not letting her daughter waste her time on socks when there was reading to do.

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