Let People Fail

I'm a big believer that one of the single best things you can do for the ones you love is let them fail! To deny someone the opportunity to fail is one of the greatest injustices you can do. Besides, without understanding failure, you can never really appreciate victory.

Allowing children (and adults) the opportunity to learn by trial and error is one of the best ways to engrain a skill. Please don't take what I am writing out of context. I am not suggesting that you let your freshly walking child to roam the highways to learn to fail. But I am suggesting that letting a child learning to walk fall and not always catching him or her could dramatically increase his or her ability to learn to walk at an earlier age.

When our little guy was first learning to sit up he had this nasty habit of throwing his head back and flopping to the ground. This was okay when he was propped up with his nursing pillow because it cushioned the blow. However, if he was ever sitting on a harder surface, it was a painful experience. In an effort to help him overcome this, we assisted in letting him fail.

We quickly transitioned from propping him with a nursing pillow to using normal pillows which did not cushion him as well. The result, nothing changed. So, we went to the next step, let him fail a little bigger. Instead of a pillow, all he got was a thick blanket on a carpeted surface - definitely harder than pillow, but still plenty soft that he was going to really hurt himself. However, it needs to be hard enough to entice him to change his behavior. End result was, it only slightly modified his actions. So, the thick blanket became a thin blanket – and presto. He was able to fail and realized he didn't like it. So he changed his behavior.

If you constantly bail someone out, that person will never learn to fend for themselves. This is not about tough love. This is about helping people to become independent and playing a role to help empower the people around you.

Think back to when you were in school writing tests. If you wrote a test and there were 20 questions and you managed to answer 17 questions correctly – what did you go and review when you got the test back? If you are like most people, the first thing you did is went to the three questions you got incorrect to learn not to repeat the mistake for the final exam. Even if you guessed at some of the answers, our tendency is to go to the ones we got wrong to learn. Don't deny people the experience of learning from their mistakes.

Let people fail! All successful people do!