

Raising a Confident Child



Letting Your Child Fail: Tips for Teaching Perseverance

By [Colleen Brunetti, M.Ed.](#)

There are many ways you can teach perseverance in your everyday activities. This particular trait can be a tough one because **in order to learn perseverance a child must first experience frustration and failure** – and then try again and move through it. It's frustrating for the child, who may react with tears and meltdowns, and it is challenging for the parent who may want to sweep in and help. Challenging though it can be, there are many things you can do to ensure your child's environment and models are just right for teaching resilience.

The Right Environment

As Meg Drake describes in her article, *Developing Resilient Children After 100 Years of Montessori Education* (2008), [Dr. Robert Brooks](#), an expert in raising resilient children, has many suggested guidelines for parents wishing to take a proactive approach. The first steps have to do with the parent – who must teach empathy, establish good communication, and set realistic individualized goals. Further, Brooks suggests that they look for and encourage a child's unique strengths. Brook

then goes on to focus on things the child can do, such as establish a sense of ownership and community (perhaps by a special chore or task they do daily).

When your child experiences frustration or failure, it is really important that you give him the time and space to try. You can be present and supportive while doing this, while resisting the urge to jump in and fix it.

The Right Words

When frustrations do occur, validate the child's feelings by showing empathy with supporting words, such as, "Oh, frustrated because your block tower fell down. That was a big crash! Can we try to build it again together?" Assure that you understand their frustrations, and that you are there to support, but don't give an easy out.

Give your child words they need, such as "I'm frustrated!" that they can use instead of screaming or having physical outbursts such as pushing. You might also try introducing some simple signs, such as TRY, WAIT, and AGAIN.

[Hagar Scher of Parents Magazine](#) suggests that you try to praise a child's efforts instead of making blanket statements. For instance, instead of saying, "You are just the best baseball player!" Try saying, "I like how you kept swinging the bat though you missed sometimes. That effort makes you a great player!" Children are more likely to respond to specific praise rather than general statements that may in fact raise the bar too high (Are they really the best? In your eyes of course as they should be! But the best of the best? That's a little different.)

Learn from the Experts

Perhaps one of the most effective ways to teach perseverance is through popular children's literature and song. Think of the [itsy bitsy spider](#). That little guy crawled up the spout, fell down, and got right back up and did it again. Or consider the book [The Little Engine that Could](#), where children can learn first hand in fun and inviting ways how to keep on keeping on.

Above all, model perseverance yourself. Even adults experience frustrations and setbacks. When you do, try to verbalize how you feel, but also show what you will do to make the situation better. You can say things such as, "Oh no! Mommy had a wrong turn on the street! That's okay, I will just turn the car around on this street here and we will be at the party in 15 minutes!"

Before you know it, your little one will be the "little engine that could" themselves... and sometimes that teaches us something or two about a can-do spirit.

REFERENCES

Drake, Meg (2008). Developing Resilient Children After 100 Years of Montessori Education. *Montessori Life*, 20(2), 28-31.

Scher, Hagar (2012) The Trying Game: Teaching Perseverance to Kids. Retrieved from <http://www.parents.com/kids/development/social/teaching-perseverance-kids/>