

Over the past several years, there have been several child psychologists that have written books regarding the need for pre-teens and teens to experience safe failure. I have written previously about Avril Beckford's, "Allow Your Children to Fail if You Want Them to Succeed" and Wendy Mogel's, "The Blessing of a Skinned Knee". Certainly, in the Middle School, children experiencing failure in their academic, athletic, and social endeavors within a safe environment allows them to develop their resiliency. Mogel's second offering, "The Blessing of a B Minus: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Resilient Teenagers" is again filled with poignant lessons for parents to consider in guiding children through the teenage years.

Some pearls of wisdom offered by Mogel follow:

“We cross an important line when we demand a predetermined or unrealistic set of accomplishments for our teens. Your son as scholar-athlete-entrepreneur-humanitarian? Few, if any, adults possess all of these talents ...”

From a section titled "Deflating the Drama of Homework",
“When a parent nervously overcontrols a teen's homework schedule, or when a parent reads and corrects the homework, the student doesn't have the opportunity to learn the nuanced relationship between his effort and his outcomes...Does this mean you have to just sit back and watch them fail? Sometimes.”

On developing independence in children, “If we want children to learn the skills of independent living and to acquire good judgment before they leave home, they need to experience ‘good suffering’ now... It's good for adolescents to be bored,

lonely, disappointed, frustrated, and unhappy... It's good for them to sit on the bench sometimes and even to have their hearts broken.”

The lessons, while directed towards us as parents, emerge daily in our hallways in the teachable moments capitalized on by our faculty. As the adults guiding them, we must remain aware of a dynamic described by Mogel as “compassionate detachment”. She defines this as “viewing the upsetting aspects of adolescence as normal and necessary ... thus, bad grades, emotional outbursts, rudeness, breaking the rules ... become signs that a teen is on course.”

Within this mindset, we can respond to our students' behaviors and academic performance calmly. As students move through our Middle School, we equip them with strategies to develop resourcefulness as learners. We listen and offer guidance as they wrestle with the expanding grey areas of ethical dilemmas. We provide structure for our students to grow by holding them accountable to expectations with natural consequences. Within these expanding boundaries, our Middle School students transition from the dependence of pre-adolescence to the independence of adolescence.

And it is in the journey of that transition that students experience the challenges that accompany safe failures. As parents and educators, those challenges and the weight of mentoring our students through them keep us up late at night. We can all take solace in knowing we're in this journey together.