

## Letting Them Fail

Nurturing is the easy part. Wake me out of a sound sleep, and my natural instinct will be to care for those I love. Need to talk? I'm all ears. Need help? Let me get my shoes on. Need money? Here's my wallet.

Giving my kids whatever they need is easy for me, with one exception. I have a hard time giving them the freedom to fail.

Like many parents, I am completely committed to helping my children succeed. In fact, sometimes I become aware that my investment in their success may be greater than their own.

At that point, I pull myself up short. I am trying, but it's not an easy thing to learn to let my children fail.

Kids give us practice at this all through their lives. Watching toddlers struggle to put a puzzle together is a good example. Many of us (especially mothers) have to sit on our hands as we watch them work so hard to put in the piece—upside down.

We clench our teeth when they comb their own hair and pick out their own clothes. It's like fingernails on a chalkboard to see them leave for school with mismatched clothes and a hairdo like Alfalfa.

Teenagers challenge us endlessly. We walk a tightrope between helping them succeed and letting them fail. Do we drive their clean P.E. clothes to school when they forget them? Do we insist that they stay home and study for an exam instead of joining friends on an outing?

Ultimately, our children become adults. Their choices are their own. Some please us, and others cause us to lose sleep. It's difficult to sit and watch them head down a path which we fear will result in disaster.

Hopefully, adulthood follows many years of practice in making choices. Judgment comes from experiences at trial and error. Letting go of adult children is a little less painful when we've given them the freedom to fail in smaller doses along the way.

As one who is still learning about letting go, I have acquired some tools to help me. I remind myself of the resilience my children have shown in the past, even when they made mistakes. I try to keep the lines of communication open and free of much advice. I seek the counsel of other parents who can add to my perspective. I remember my own failures which have led to opportunities to learn.

We parents wish we could make every path smooth for our children. But like a butterfly who must struggle to emerge from his own chrysalis, our children can only learn resilience and build character when they face their own challenges.

So if you find yourself struggling to let your children fail, call me. We can sit on our hands together.