



# HOW TO FAIL: A Lesson for my Children

Natasha Geary writes on an age-old but important life lesson for kids. **Never give up!**

I wish failure was taught in school. It should be because it's the flip side to success; you don't get one without the other. Our children aren't taught that the road to success is potholed with painful failures. They aren't taught that it's okay to fail. They aren't taught that failure doesn't matter, but their response to it does.

I'm forty-two years old, and despite appearances, I'm a failure. I've failed to achieve the one goal I've been striving towards for most of my adult life. For fourteen years I've been trying (and failing) to become a published writer.

If I'd been taught at school that it was okay to fail, I might have persevered sooner. But I waited until I found myself on maternity leave wondering who I'd been before the all-encompassing job of mother was hefted upon me. Cue late nights writing and 5am alarm calls at weekends to squeeze in 'writing time' before my new baby woke. No one ever said it was

going to be easy and it wasn't. When I finished – four years later – I got myself a copy of 'The Creative Artist and Writers Handbook' and packaged off my first few chapters to perspective agents. I waited for the rejections to roll in because that's what everyone tells you will happen. But I was astounded to get an offer of representation from a wonderful agent with relative ease. My 'baby' (by then five years old) remembers me jumping around the kitchen screaming with excitement. I was delirious. This must surely mean I was a good writer and my novel was going to make me rich and famous – right? Wrong. Nine gruelling months of editing and re-writing followed before my agent was happy to start submitting it to publishers. Then the 'positive rejections' began flowing in. Everyone liked it, but no one made an offer.

But I had an idea for my second novel, I'd just write it! I'd do it quicker this time, it would be easier

second time round, right? Wrong. Armed with a grant from NI Arts Council I made the dubious decision to take a career break and concentrate on my writing. It took another four years to complete the second book. Now with two small children in tow, my latest novel became my third. It exhausted me, kept me up late at night and pushed me to the brink of sanity. But this was going to be 'the one' and it was all going to be worth it. Wrong, again. This time I got as far as face-to-face meetings with two publishers in London, only for them to not make an offer. I was devastated. The proximity of the prize being dangled before me was akin to coming fourth at an Olympics.

As a society we celebrate success without emphasising the failures it takes to get there, whereas in America failure is not seen as an end, but a beginning. It's a nation that builds people up, they don't strip them down for trying. Jeff

Bezos of Amazon embraces failure claiming it is 'not optional.' Thomas Edison, inventor of the lightbulb amongst other revolutionary inventions said, "I have not failed, I have just found 10,000 ways that don't work." In 2000 in her Harvard Commencement speech JK Rowling spoke of her failures:

"I had failed on an epic scale. An exceptionally short-lived marriage had imploded and I was jobless, a lone parent, and as poor as it is possible to be in modern Britain, without being homeless. The fears that my parents had had for me, and that

I had had for myself, had both come to pass, and by every usual standard, I was the biggest failure I knew."

Failure can be a positive force that makes you stronger and more determined to succeed, no matter what the odds, but that message is missing in our culture. Our children should be taught that failure is part of life, that it makes

you better and the eventual success taste even sweeter.

Both my boys knew what the trip to London last summer was about and what was at stake, especially my eldest, now twelve years old. It was tough telling him it had all come to nothing. Again. But what example would I be if I gave up now? The image of my boys lifting my book from a bookshop shelf and saying, "Mum wrote this" has sustained me through many late nights and long days and it sustains me still. When a book of mine does eventually get on the shelf they'll know the failures it took to get there and that I didn't give up. That's the lesson I want them to learn. As social media and the pressures of our instantaneous world stack up against our children resilience is what they need... and nothing builds resilience like a good dose of failure!

*"The real test is not whether you avoid this failure, because you won't. It's whether you let it harden or shame you into inaction, or whether you learn from it; whether you choose to persevere."*

– Barack Obama

*"If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time"*

– Steve Jobs

