

-- The Art of Letting Go--How to Foster Self-Advocacy in Our Kids



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Self-Advocacy

What Qualities Does an Effective Self-Advocate Have?

- Strong self-developed identity
 - knowledge of who they are, and how they fit in (relationships)
- Accurate, synthesized knowledge of their own abilities
 - both strength and challenges
- Broad self-confidence
 - comfortable taking risks
- The habit of appropriately engaging authoritative figures (outside the family)
 - the Outlier Principle



Self-Advocacy

How do we "foster" these characteristics in our children?

Key concepts and tools we'll cover:

- Self-knowledge & independence
- Raising an "I can" child
- Success, failure & resiliency: why failure is important
- Ordinary vs. catastrophic failure
- Product vs. outcome
- Internal vs. external identity
- Affording independence



The Basics

True self-advocacy is not situation specific

- It must occur regardless of context
- It must occur regardless of familiarity



The Basics

There is no single method or style of effective self-advocacy

- Different styles can be effective
- Effective methods vary with context



Fostering self-advocacy is therefore <u>not</u> situational training

It is not training your child what to say or how to say it.

Fostering self-advocacy *is* core character building

 It is helping our children to know who they are, what they need, and giving them practice advocating for themselves.



The Basics

Self-advocacy is not "taught" when students begin high school

- Building it should be a philosophy of child-raising
- Be intentional create a plan for building self-advocacy based on your child's age

BFO's

- To effectively advocate for self...
 You must know yourself.
- To advocate for what you need...
 You must know what you need.
- To know what you need...
 You must know what you can and cannot do.



Knowledge of Self

The core foundation of Self-Advocacy is self-knowledge

Effective self-advocacy requires an intuitive, practical, internalized, concrete knowledge of your capabilities, your strengths, and your challenges.

- Like all "true" knowledge, this comes from self-experience
- Doctrine dictated by others will not suffice
 - You cannot "tell" them
 - Think about your own self-knowledge

Second Outrageous Proposition

You do not know what your child is capable of,

or can or will be.





A Corollary

(For those who disagree)

Your knowledge or belief of what your child is capable of is irrelevant

 Your children <u>MUST</u> learn this knowledge for themselves to effectively self-advocate

More BFO's

- For your child to know what he is capable of...
 He must be allowed to succeed <u>independently</u>
- To succeed on his own...
 Your child must be allowed to <u>fail</u> independently
 There is no success...

...without possibility of failure

To be insulated from failure...
 Is to be insulated from success...
 ...and from accurate knowledge of self

Pause for thought...

There is a direct relationship between effective self-advocacy and independence.

A person who is afforded independence develops the accurate knowledge of his capabilities that is <u>required</u> for effective self-advocacy.

(See that theme? Letting go....)

Self Knowledge and Independence

How do we foster self-knowledge and independence?

You already know this...

... At least you did when you had a toddler

 You are now programmed against doing it by two <u>ENORMOUS</u> forces, acting in concert



Roadblocks to Fostering Self-Advocacy

To foster a self-advocate, you <u>MUST</u> be alert for the influence (and confluence) of two overwhelming forces:

The most powerful parental instinct:
PROTECTION

The most powerful cultural bias: SUCCESS

Parental instinct: PROTECTION

- Hardwired in genes
- Culturally enforced the "protection racket"
 - Marketing
 - Politics
- Habitually enforced
 - Life decisions: Which job to take? Where to live? Which schools?
 - Daily choices:
 - Organics
 - Medication
 - Helmets
 - Seat belts, air bags
 - Smoke detectors
 - Product safety



Parental instinct: PROTECTION

We spend a vast amount of our intellectual, emotional, instinctual and economic lives *protecting* our children

Imagine how hard it is to buck that trend

(Hold that thought...)



Cultural Bias: SUCCESS

It's EVERYWHERE:

- Cars, homes, celebrities, media, heroes, sports, myths, politics, wealth, marriage, education...
 - "My Child is a [fill-in-the-blank] Honor Student"
 - Grades

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Cultural Bias: SUCCESS

Counter-bias:

FAILURE



How does that word make you feel?

Adults: "He's a failure."

Kids: "Epic Fail!"

Schools: "F" for Failure



Are you comfortable yet?

Government: "Failure is <u>NOT</u> an option!!!!"



Roadblocks to Fostering Self-Advocacy

Put these two overwhelming forces together:

- The parental instinct to PROTECT
- The cultural bias against FAILURE

Result: We protect our children from failure



Roadblocks to Fostering Self-Advocacy

You are under enormous pressure (internal and external) to protect your children from failure

However, to effectively foster self-advocacy...

... you *must* buck that trend

To self-advocate, your children <u>must</u> know what they can <u>and cannot</u> do



When is "Success" failure? When is "Failure" success?

- How do we define these terms?
- Do we define them differently in theory than in practice?



"Success" is failure when the guarantee of success:

- Robs our children of learning what they are <u>not</u> capable of
- Gives them an inaccurately elevated sense of what they can do
- Prevents them from learning how to do something (or doing it better)
- Keeps them from developing pride in their achievements
- Insulates them from learning what they need to succeed
- Prevents them from learning to persevere
- Inhibits resiliency

All of these are necessary for self-advocacy

When is "Failure" success?

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"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career."
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"I've lost almost 300 games."

"Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game's winning shot and missed."

"I've failed over and over again in my life..."

"...and that is why I succeed."

-- Michael Jordan



When is "Failure" success?

- True failure is not falling down, even repeatedly.
- True failure is when we stop getting up and trying.
- Perseverance requires practice at "failure":
 - Resiliency

"Failure" is success when it provides:

- An opportunity for true learning
 - of skills, or about self (self-knowledge)
- a foundation for perseverance, esteem and confidence based on <u>real</u> (independent) success
 - The Cub Scout Bird feeder
 - "I Can" child which one?

Won't failure (or repeated failure) hurt esteem?

- False esteem defeats effective self-advocacy
 - An accurate perception of independent ability is critical
- Not if we free our children from the cultural bias against failure
 - Normalize failure!
 - Outside examples (e.g., science!)
 - Personal examples (our own!)



How many of you are failures?

Think about yesterday's "to do list":

- Did you fail to get everything done?
- Were you bold in setting goals though?
- Was it ok and "normal" not to get everything done?
- Did you brag about your failures to your kids?
 - Cultural bias!



Normalizing failure (making it ok):

Fosters confidence and risk-taking

Risk taking (experimenting and creativity)

 Is crucial to learning how you can succeed and what you need to do it

Confidence, and knowing how you can succeed and what you need

Is crucial to self-advocacy



Self-Advocacy requires:

- Accurate self-knowledge
- Self-confidence and resiliency

These are fostered by:

- Independence
- Freedom to truly succeed or fail

Two enormous influences working against us are:

- Parental instinct to protect
- Cultural bias against failure



When and how do we allow our children to fail (or succeed) in order to foster independence and self-advocacy?

(Our children will fail – the question is how and when.)

Ordinary & Catastrophic Failure

Distinguish between ordinary and catastrophic failure

- Allow them to fail when it's safe
- Raise an "I can" child"
 - The toddler



The Cub Scout birdfeeder



The bike





Ordinary & Catastrophic Failure

Madeline Levine

The Price of Privilege

HarperCollins, 2006

- College dropout rates
- Catastrophic outcome rates
- Insulation from ordinary failure leads to catastrophic failure

It impairs development of resiliency

...and inhibits self-knowledge and self-advocacy



Ordinary & Catastrophic Failure

Failure is safer in high school than college or adulthood

Failure is safer in middle school than high school

...and yet...



How can we shift our focus to allowing our children independence and ordinary failures?

How do we distinguish between them, and identify safe opportunities for failure?

(F's are scary!!!!)

One powerful tool....



Product vs. Outcomes

Distinguish between product and outcome

- Most of what you can see is product and doesn't matter
- Most of what is invisible is outcome and is important

Fight the natural tendency to focus on the visible

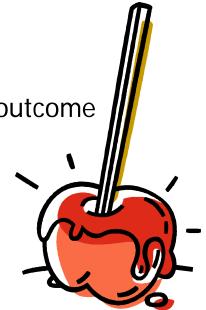


The Cub Scout bird feeder

- The apple was the product
 - and it didn't matter
- The learning (and the message!) was the outcome
 - and it DID matter!

What did they see & learn?

- The parent
- The "enabled" cub scouts
- The "disabled" cub scout



Doing dishes:



- Clean dishes are a product
 - they don't matter (even if they're broken!)
 - Normalize failure
 - Encourage risk-taking
 - Focus on the outcome



- Learning responsibility, feeling capable and contributing was the outcome
 - and it DID matter!

The 4th grade Mission project (or the 6th grade Egypt Project) (or the 9th grade Periodic Table):



- The project is a product
 - neither its appearance nor the grade matters
- The learning (about how they work and what they can do independently) is the outcome
 - and it *does* matter



A Side Note:

Avoid "buts"





Can you see a grade?

Grades are products

– they don't matter!!!!

Learning, independence, confidence and resiliency are outcomes

– they matter!

Madeline Levine on grades:

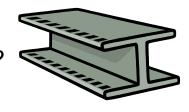
- "What grade did you get on your test today?"
- "What did you learn today?"

Grades are a measure of an external rubric....





A pretty glass ball or a steel spine?



Build your child from the inside out, not the outside in.

An effective self-advocate has defined who she is, not been told who she is.

- How do we resolve a conflict between our "self" and others' expectations of us?
- How does that impact self-advocacy?





An effective self-advocate has a strong, <u>self-developed</u> sense of identity

 She knows who she is internally, and her relationship to the world around her

This sense of position is her compass

 It allows her to steer her course, to advocate for herself, despite the shifting tides and winds of external force and opinion.

If we define ourselves and our success by external (culturally defined) rubric, our happiness and direction is contingent on others

We have no internal compass by which to guide our

self-advocacy





- Madeline Levine's work product vs. outcome
- Peter Benson's work
 40 Developmental Assets
 www.Search-Institute.org
 Focus on Assets, not curriculum

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Internal vs. External Identity

Pay attention to Adolescence!

- Developmental stages of identity
 - 1st: The mirror of parental reflection (elementary school)
 - 2nd: Shatter the mirror -- peer reflection (middle school)
 - 3rd: Shatter the mirror -- nuanced individuality (late high school)

In adolescence, their developmental job is to reject you, and become what you don't want them to be

(See that theme? Letting go.....)

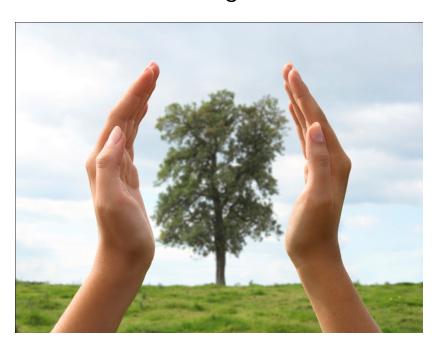


This self-development of identity is critical to self-advocacy

- Honor the stage
 - don't force your vision of their identity upon them
- Doing this requires a "quiet" relationship
 - provide silent spaces, let them fill the silence, and listen!
- Afford increasing independence, to allow their identity to develop...
 - -- open your hand... (let them go...)



Find <u>EVERY</u> excuse for giving independence
-- and the self-learning that comes from it







Boy Scouts of America

- One of the most thoroughly developed, studied, widelyimplemented and effective developmental youth programs
- Tracks Peter Benson's work on assets
- Cub scouts (grades 1-5)
 - Family oriented, with increasing independence through ranks
- Boy Scouts (grades 5-12)
 - Boy led (News Flash!!! Coming Soon.... Girl led!)
- Engineer for success
 - Stand back and allow failure (and learning)



Have you met an Eagle Scout?

Definition of an effective self-advocate





Scouting's Founder: Lord Baden-Powell--

"Never do anything a boy can do."

- Profound philosophical approach
- Dovetails perfectly with "product vs. outcome" analysis
- Sends a profound message: "I believe in you"
 - Baseball glove oil



Skylight

Driving







Never do anything for your child that (s)he can do herself

(Pause for thought)

- Chores
- Schoolwork
- Advocacy
- (and especially...) Thinking!

Ask Don't Tell

Never provide an answer to a question that they can answer themselves

-- even wrongly

- Respond to questions with questions
- Don't teach them -- ask them to teach you
- You will foster a "thinker" who has the habit of solving their own problems
 - -- i.e., a self-advocate



Foster Other Adult Relationships

BFO: The Outlier Principle:

- The more you do something, the better you are at it
 Self-Advocacy requires a comfort level in engaging authority figures
- You must give your children experience doing so
 - Scouting
 - Peter Benson's Assets
- Get elementary kids an email account
 - Have them email teachers, coaches, etc.
- Middle and high school interviews for research projects



Self-Advocacy requires:

- Broad self-confidence, risk-taking and resiliency
- Accurate, internalized self-knowledge of abilities
- Strong self-formed identity (focusing on internal rubric)
- Comfort in engaging authority

Review

Key foundations are:

- Independence ("I can")
- Freedom to succeed or fail (and build resilience)
 - accurate self-knowledge and confidence

Review

Two enormous influences working against you are:

- Parental instinct to protect
- Cultural bias against failure

Review

Strategies to foster self-advocacy are:

- Normalizing failure (to encourage risk-taking and build resiliency)
- Distinguishing between ordinary and catastrophic failure (and allowing ordinary failure)
- Distinguishing between Product and Outcome (and focusing on Outcome)
- Promoting a self-developed internal identity (de-emphasizing external rubrics)
- Seeking opportunities for independence
- Asking, not telling (to promote habits of independent thinking and problem-solving)
- Creating a habit of engaging authority figures



Questions & Conversations

Outrage?

Resonance?

Sparks?

But, but, buts?

