

SAFE TO BE WRONG

PARENTING CHALLENGES ★ PAGE 1 OF 1

Is it safe to be wrong in your home? Can your children make a mistake without being punished? What do you do when you make a mistake?

As a former school teacher, I have seen innumerable children who were afraid to make a mistake. Mistakes are the way many things are learned. A child who spills milk is learning to hold a glass with two hands. A child who trips on his/her shoelaces is learning to finish one task before he/she dashes off to another. An adult who puts too much in a trash bag therefore dumping trash all over the floor, is learning to pay attention and move slower. Mistakes are the way many things are learned.

As a teacher, it was vital that I create a safe atmosphere in which to learn. First, I stopped any and all put-downs for a wrong answer or a mistake. Second, I responded to a wrong answer or mistake in a positive way: "That's not the answer I am looking for—keep thinking!". To an accident I responded, "It's ok. I will get a sponge and you can help me clean up the spilled paint." These same positive statements need to be made at home so your children feel safe in trying something that is new to them.

One more thought; do you always need to be right? It is a mathematical impossibility that you will ALWAYS be right while parenting your children. To act as if you are always right, pushes your children away from you. They know better! They do not respect you for pretending or for powering over them in your attempt to look good. Get in the game with them—tell the truth, "You know, I don't want to yell any more. I wish I had not yelled at you a minute ago. My message is that I want you to pick up your jacket and take it to your room right now. I can say those words without getting so angry." Children respect a parent who tells the truth, especially when he or she is off- base.

There is a tremendous difference between punishment and serving a consequence. Punishment has a "I'm going to get even with you" energy in it. A consequence is the natural result of a choice. If I step on a rake it will hit me in the face. Being hit is the consequence of my choice. Now I can choose to put the rake face down so it won't pop up or watch where I walk. The consequence of being hit in the face lead me to new choices. The last thing I need when something like this happens is Darth Vader telling me how stupid I was, "If you would watch where you are walking, you wouldn't hurt yourself all the time. You are such a klutz!"

Consequences teach children to make better choices. Punishment empowers the anger, resentment and revenge cycle. (See "anger.") Give fair consequences. (See "agreements and consequences.") Say nothing when your child has already experienced the consequence of a choice. Make your home a **safe** place in which to make mistakes or to be "wrong."