



## **FAIL FORWARD: LEARN TO ADAPT**

Most kids are afraid to fail and, as teachers, we naturally want our kids to succeed.

But what if we recognized **failure is good and a crucial step on the path to learning?**

Failure is a *necessary component of success* (NOT its opposite). In fact, our brains grow and develop in important ways whenever failure occurs. When kids understand this concept, amazing things can happen for them (and for us).

Resilience expert Rachel Simmons says,

“Think about your biggest mistakes....They probably taught you more courage, strength, and wisdom than any success could have.” Instead of letting children fear failure, we can help them see it for the learning opportunity it is.

Here are 7 ways to teach kids about the gift of failure, and how to do it skillfully:

## 1 FOCUS ON GROWTH MINDSET

After making a mistake, children with **growth mindset** show a larger brain response than those with fixed mindsets.



## 2 LET FAILURE HAPPEN

Challenging experiences are the only way we develop certain coping and **problem-solving skills**. If we shield children from adversity, key brain connections cannot develop.



## 3 EMBRACE (AND CELEBRATE) FAILURE

- Give kids an opportunity to brag about their mistakes
- Introduce "Failure Fridays"
- Give your child a high-five each time a mistake is made
- Use the "My Favorite No" activity.
- Discuss the acronym for **FAIL** (**F**irst **A**ttempt **I**n **L**earning)



## 4 EXPLAIN 'THE LEARNING PIT'

Teach children the 'pit' metaphor, and make it part of their daily vocabulary. For example, during a challenging activity, ask, "**Who is in the pit? Who is out of the pit?**"



## 5 EXPLAIN THE BRAIN SCIENCE

Kids typically fear failure. But what if they knew **mistakes grew their brains**? When kids understand the brain science behind why mistakes improve learning, it's easy to get them excited about the prospect.



## 6 EMPHASIZE "FAILING FORWARD"

Failing forward simply means learning from your errors. Ask questions like, "**What did you learn from this?**" or "**What would you do differently next time?**"

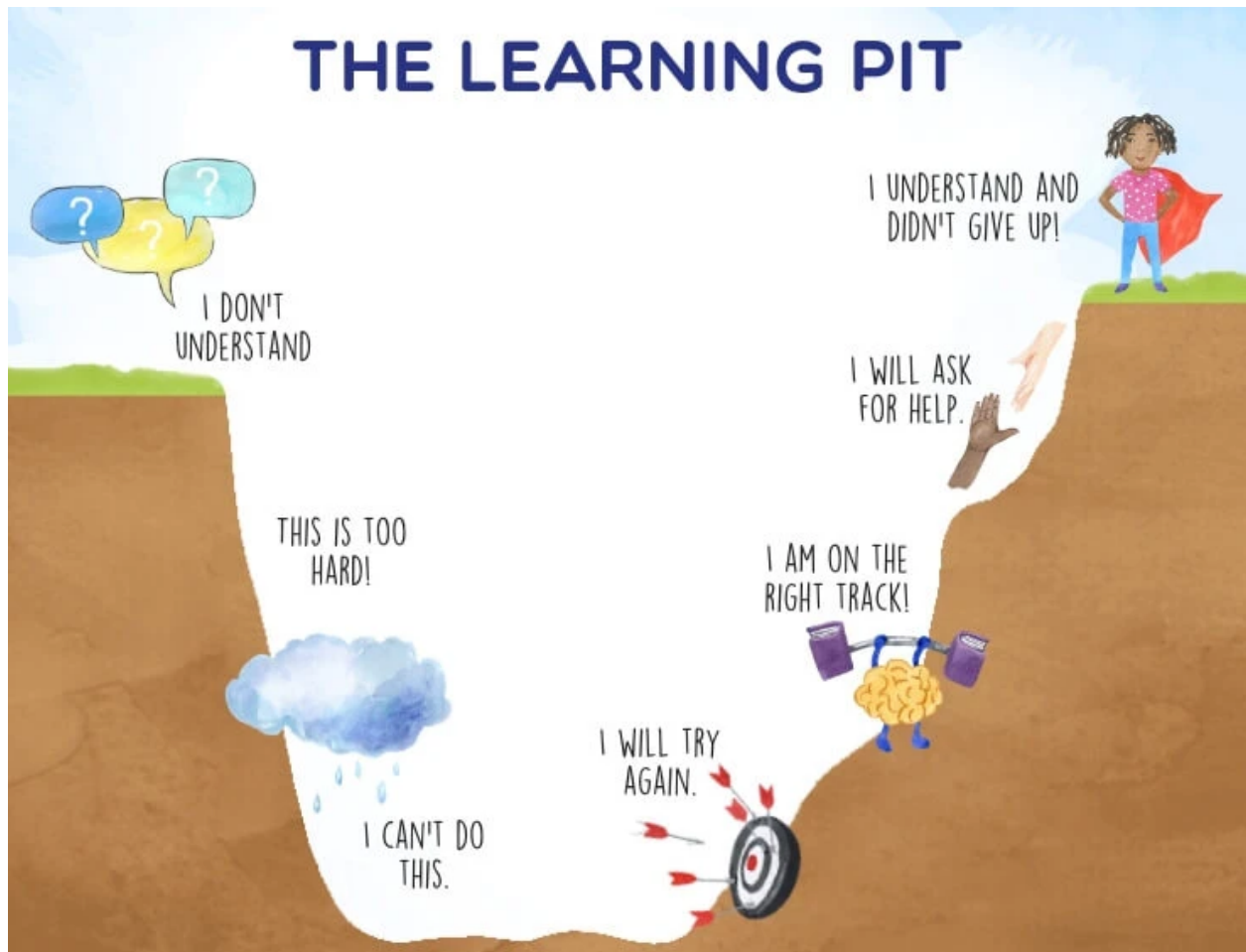
Shift focus onto the positive aspects of failure.



## 7 TEACH THE MINDFUL APPROACH

The link between mindfulness and resilience is very well documented. With practice, kids can **learn to respond to strong feelings** about failure rather than simply reacting.





Even with these strategies, failure can still be overwhelming sometimes. Training kids to take a mindful approach is key in dealing with *any* big emotion, like sadness or anger. With practice, kids can learn to *respond* to strong feelings about failure rather than simply *reacting*.

The link between mindfulness and resilience is very well documented. Recently, a study at Florida State University found mindful college students were more like to *find benefit* in adversity. When faced with perceived failure, they also remained confident of their academic abilities (Hanley et al., 2015).

So how can we help children establish a more mindful attitude?



Created by Michelle McDonald, the RAIN technique is a simple way for kids to *notice* and *accept* their feelings. Here are the four steps:

**R**-Recognize what is happening (“What is happening in this moment? How am I feeling?” “Where do I feel it in my body?”)

Example: *“I’m so mad at myself for failing my spelling test. I want to cry.”*

**A**-Allow life to be just as it is (“I can let the thoughts or feelings just be here. Even if I don’t like it.”)

Example: *“I am mad and I feel like crying. It’s uncomfortable but I can allow myself to feel this way.”*

**I**-Investigate with kindness (“Why do I feel this way?” “Is it really true?”)

Example: *“I notice I’m also a little disappointed in myself too, not just mad. I’m wondering why? Maybe it’s because I think I could have studied more.”*

**N**-Non-Identification (“I am having a thought or emotion, but I am not that thought or emotion.”)

Example: *“I can have angry and disappointed feelings without *being* those feelings. I am bigger than how I feel at this moment.”*

To practice the RAIN strategy, simply print the above steps and model it using one of your *own* failures. Then ask if your child would like to try this process with her recent mistake.



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