

THE OPPORTUNITY TO FAIL

Success has been defined as the ability to go from failure to failure without becoming discouraged. It's the old familiar idea of trial and error. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Throughout various stages of life, we use this technique to find out what works for us and what doesn't. It means venturing into unfamiliar territory. It means taking risks. But from this process we gain the wisdom and toughness required for maturity and independence. The best educational programs are those in which we are given responsibilities and then allowed to make mistakes. We find out that mistakes are to learn and to go forward from.

However, children with disabilities are often "protected" from this opportunity by those around them who want to shield them from the discouragement of failure, the realities of life. This negative "father knows best" approach emphasizes what can't be done rather than encouraging what might be accomplished by trying. It assumes failure instead of recognizing that even an attempt to try is positive in itself. This attitude fosters dependence instead of independence because it assumes that people without disabilities know what is best for people with disabilities. It overlooks the fact that children, even those with disabilities, will mature and accept responsibility if they are not forced into dependency.

Every developing human being, with disabilities or without, needs an environment which encourages trying. Everyone must have an environment which offers positive opportunities to learn from mistakes, instead of negative warnings of what can't be done. Everyone needs an opportunity to try and an opportunity to fail – in other words, an opportunity to learn.

