



## Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

# What next? Helping kids cope with rejection

Life is hard. Disappointments happen. Sometimes we lose when we deserve to win. Sometimes we win when we deserve to lose.

As adults, we've had practice coping with a letdown. But for children, the pain is fresh and the wounds particularly deep. They're not prepared for unexpected blows, nor do they understand how a loss might benefit them long-term. One rejection can feel like the new norm, and with every subsequent defeat, they might fear they'll never break the cycle. Once a loser, always a loser.

That isn't true, of course — at least not for those who keep plugging away — but try explaining that to the boy cut from his baseball team or the girl who didn't make cheerleader. Try convincing anyone who just failed miserably that there's hope.

So what's a parent to do? How can we pull our children from the pit when they fall in? I don't have many answers, but I do know this: We don't jump in the pit with them. We don't act like it's the end of the world or throw confetti on their pity party because that fuels their fears. *Our* attitude affects *their* attitude, and if we in our infinite wisdom send a message of doom and gloom, what does that say about their future?

Let me clarify that I believe parents should share in a child's disappointment. We should cry with them if that's where our heart is and allow a mourning period. Since many tryouts fall on Friday, we often have a weekend to work with. For two days we can grant our child permission to mope, scream, sob and vent. We can let their ugliest emotions be acknowledged to get it all out of their system.

But come Monday morning, the world starts spinning again. Come Monday morning, our child will have to rise back up and ask a crucial question: "What next?" Will they try out again next year or branch into something new? Could now be the time for soul-searching?

People have different ways of moving on, and even if they're spinning their wheels a while, going through the motions to get a game plan, it's a step in the right direction.

As a parent, I worry about the heartache my kids will face. But my biggest fear is that they'll quit trying. This happens a lot, and it happened to me in grade school when I stopped trying out for plays because I failed a few times.

For years my sister, Krissie, and I auditioned for productions, and together we made our first

three. But then *The Wizard of Oz* came along, and Krissie made it without me. I was OK with one rejection, but when the same thing happened two more times, I dropped out of acting. Having my little sister show me up was embarrassing, and by cutting my losses early, I thought I could avoid future grief.

To this day I regret giving up something I loved. If only I'd admitted to my parents that my reason for quitting was fear, not a loss of interest, they could have encouraged me to stick with it. They could have explained that failure is a part of life, and with every effort I made, I increased the likelihood of the tide turning in my favor.

Babe Ruth once said, "Never let the fear of striking out get in your way." (For the record, he struck out more than 3,000 times.) In baseball, a batting average of .300 is considered excellent. That's basically hitting three balls out of 10 — a statistic we'd balk at in real life.

But could that be our problem? If we adopted baseball's philosophy in all parts of life, would it take the pressure off us having a perfect record? Could it put our disappointments in perspective, reminding us that one home run — or better yet, a grand slam — can compensate for nine missed hits?

I think so.

If I have any advice for people down on their luck, it's this: Don't give up. Hang in there. Work hard and believe in your ability to improve. If you really love something, stick with it, because your passions help lead you to your calling. Giving up may seem safe now, but as you get older you'll regret the things you *didn't* do more than the things you *did*.

When one door closes, another opens. Embrace new opportunities and be ready to act. As Confucius said, "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

There's no shame in trying, only the remorse of passively watching the world go by. So jump back in the game by asking yourself, "What next?" These two words may be the motto you need to begin a fabulous new chapter of life.

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