

Last week the Community Outreach Program invited Jessica Lahey, the author of *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*, to speak at George Washington Middle School. In case you missed it, here is a brief synopsis of her hour-long presentation. If you are interested in more information about her, I encourage you to check out her website:

<http://www.jessicalahey.com/the-gift-of-failure/>

Jessica Lahey is both a mom and a teacher. She stated that with our best of intentions we have taught our children to avoid failure. Many times we are thinking that we are helping when in fact we are hindering our children's growth. She stated that when we do things for, or rescue our children, "we send a very clear message: that we believe they are incompetent, incapable and unworthy of our trust. Furthermore, we teach them to be dependent on us and thereby deny them the very education in competence we are put here on this earth to hand down."

She began the presentation with a discussion of motivation and stated that extrinsic motivators; money, stickers, praise, both positive and negative, undermine learning by requiring less creative output and less investment. The purpose of extrinsic motivators should be for quick, easy, one-time tasks that do not require creativity or long-term focus. On the other hand, she stressed the need for intrinsic motivation. Those tasks are the perfect amount of challenge and motivation where a child gets into what we call a "flow" - the point where you are completely absorbed in what you are doing because it's fun and you love it. She mentioned that intrinsic motivation needed three things: autonomy, competence, and connections.

**Autonomy.** Autonomous children have independence and control over their lives. Their parents don't save them, and therefore, they learn to manage setbacks and solve problems. They are able to complete projects on their own when their parents are not present as compared to the child whose parents manage their daily routine and performance. Children who are not autonomous have a fixed mindset where they can't handle challenge and frustration. They tend to be anxious since they fear failure. Children with autonomy persist when faced with challenges because they can call upon their experiences in solving their own problems.

**Competence.** Competence is not the same as confidence. Competence is a sense of accomplishment, the knowledge that they can push through frustration and persevere until they find a better way - as compared to what makes them happy right now. We see a lot of anxiety and pressure on kids to perform perfectly the first time. Make sure you put the emphasis on process, not product. Treat the A and the C+ the same. Focus on the process of learning rather than the product or grade. Ask "What did you do to prepare for this test?" Debrief it with them, don't tell them.

**Connections.** Make sure your child knows that you love them no matter what but you are not going to do it for them.

Ms. Lahey ended the presentation by reminding us that our job is "not about making our children happy or successful today, but rather helping to nurture future adults who can do this for themselves". As parents, we may feel happy when we know that we have stepped in to help our child through a difficult time, however, there is even greater joy when we give them the tools to manage life's challenges as independent individuals.