



Overcoming a fear of failure

As a new parent, you want to do the best for your child. You strive to give them the best childhood you can. It's only natural, though, that you may sometimes feel that you are failing your child and are, thus, a 'bad parent'. As a new parent, you are taking a risk. And just like any other risk you take in life, whether it's starting a new job or moving into a new area, you'll often wonder whether you're going to succeed.

What parents want

In general terms, there aren't too many differences between what you want for your child and what your parents wanted for you. Either way, you want to raise your child in safety. You want to see your child grow up to be a happy and healthy adult. But whereas for previous generations, this may have entailed giving children the skills to 'get by' or 'do well for themselves', for today's parents it seems to have taken on a whole new meaning – being perfect.

As a parent today, you are under more pressure than ever before. The search for parenting perfection is something that is frequently reinforced by the media as they highlight areas in which you, as a parent, could do better. You may also feel under pressure from other parents. Either way, we're often made to feel even more anxious to 'get it right'.

Fear of failing as a parent can set in early on, during those nine months before your child is born. It's perfectly normal as an expectant mother and father to feel both anxiety and anticipation. After all, it's a time when the responsibilities can suddenly become very clear to you. As the due date comes nearer, though, you may feel even more uncertain of yourself, and your abilities to cope with your new baby.

Fear of failing

During those early weeks and months, you may find that you are spending a great deal of time worrying about the reality of parenthood. Every aspect of parenting makes you feel overanxious and inadequate, as you strive to meet your child's emotional, social and physical needs. Decision

making about family matters becomes harder and you feel unable get on with enjoying the family life you've helped to create. Fear of failing as a parent can manifest itself in many ways.

Lack of self-belief. You find it hard to believe that you will ever succeed in being a good parent. Or you may find yourself focusing on your own parents' failures and worry that you are going to make the same mistakes. You feel helpless to change anything for the better.

Trying to do too much. A common response to parental fears is to try to do everything you can think of to be a good parent – in other words, over-prepare. You think that, if you read the right books, buy the latest baby equipment and toys, and expose your baby to as many learning opportunities as possible, you will automatically be a good parent. In trying to achieve perfection, it's easy to lose all sense of perspective, viewing other parents as competitors rather than friends, and fearing that you'll ever give your child the right skills and opportunities they'll need in the future.

Over-thinking a problem. A fear of failure can stem from a feeling that any problems you have raising your child are yours and no-one else's. You and your partner may focus on what you might be doing wrong. Without support from family and friends, any mistakes you make become over-inflated in your imagination. You may even feel that you're trapped in a never-ending loop.

Overcoming your fears

How you respond to your fear that you may not be doing a good job as a parent will make all the difference to your life and that of your child.



By identifying your 'fear factors', finding ways of addressing them, and maintaining a positive attitude to being a parent, you can look forward to raising your baby in a safe and caring family environment.

Look within. Think more closely about what sort of parent you really want to be and what you actually want for your child. A little valuable insight can go a long way in instilling confidence in your abilities as a parent. It will allow you to be strong in the face of peer pressure and less vulnerable to what other people may think and say.

Break your 'fear factors' down. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by a general sense of failure, ask yourself whether there is a specific concern that particularly bothers you. That way, instead of feeling that you're a bad parent, you know that there is just one aspect of yourself that you feel you could improve.

Don't try too hard. We all make mistakes as parents, and there's no doubt that we will continue to do so. However, one small mistake doesn't make you a bad parent. In fact, some of our best lessons in life can arise from things that we have got wrong.

Look at the bigger picture. Don't dwell on your fears by yourself or with your partner. Instead, take the debate outside the parental partnership. It can be helpful to discuss your concerns with friends, relatives or other people in your community. You may not necessarily agree with their ideas, but getting a different input will help you to gain more confidence and allow you to rationalise your fears.

Remember – perfection doesn't exist. Understand that you can manage without being perfect, or even right, all of the time. Your natural parenting instincts, combined with support from partners, friends and relatives, will help you to travel through parenthood and tackle those parts of parenting where you lack confidence. You will not become perfect parents, but you will certainly become 'good enough' parents. If your children are raised in a loving and caring environment, then your family will be just fine.