

Parenting: teens Lifestyle / Family & Relationships

# Forget about perfect parenting: mistakes are all part of rearing a healthy and happy family

Although it's only natural for parents to try and shield their children from failure, we all make mistakes. The sooner little ones realise this, the sooner they will be able to live with life's disappointments and grow in confidence

Reading Time: **4 minutes**

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As a parent, it's not just OK to be less than perfect, it can actually serve your children well if you do occasionally slip up. Making mistakes is part of the human condition and learning to live with them, how to fix them, is part of the great human challenge.

“All parents make mistakes from time to time. It's important for their children to understand this and, more importantly, get the chance to observe how their parents deal with those mistakes,” says Dr Quratulain Zaidi a clinical psychologist at Hong Kong's MindnLife centre.

**Forget parenting books, classes and Dr Google: perfect parents don't exist, so trust your instincts and get to know your children**

“Children naturally base much about how they deal with their world on the way their parents have acted and reacted – it's called modelling,” says Odette Umali, founder of parenting website, Gordon Parenting.

“It's a powerful tool in teaching kids values. Modelling happens when children witness how parents do things, how they try to make something work, how they succeed or try again when they fail.

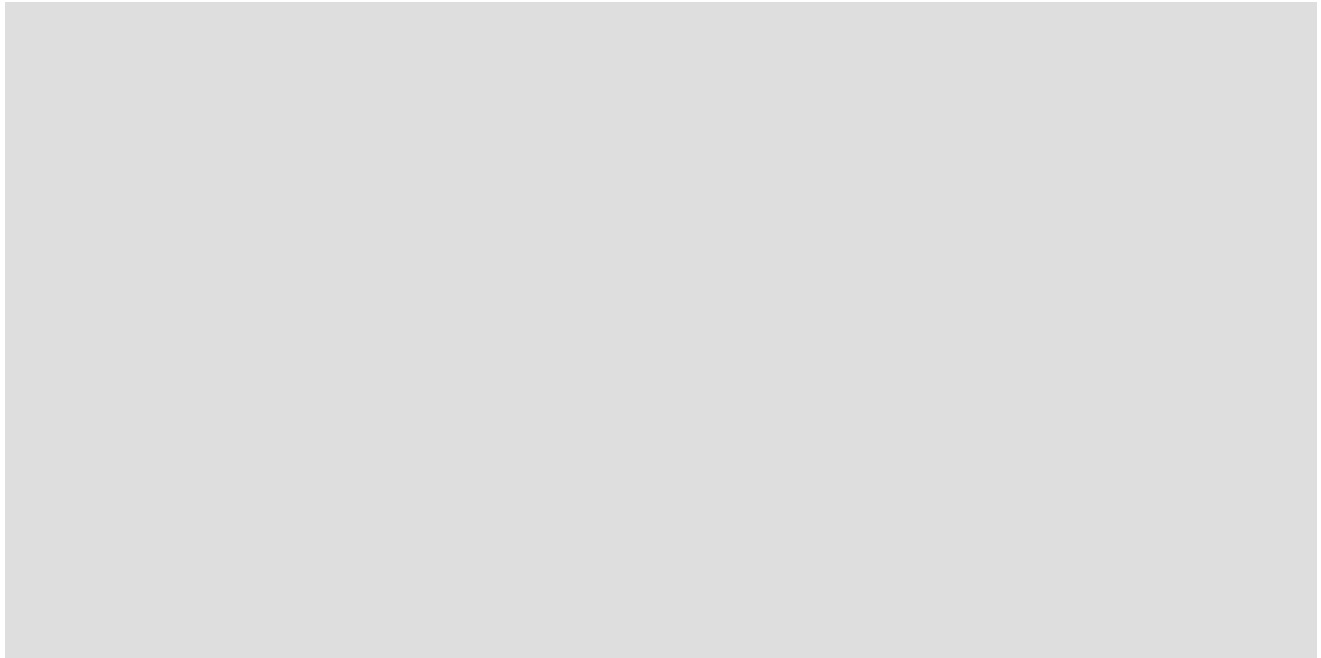


Odette Umali, founder of parenting website Gordon Parenting.

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“Grit, tenacity and vulnerability are big values and are best imbibed by children when they witness their parents model these values,” she says.

Zaidi says it's natural for parents to try to shield their children from the possibility of defeat because defeat hurts, but allowing them to fail – through mistakes made “safely – with our support”, is important.



It's OK if a parent shows their child they are less than perfect. Photo: Alamy

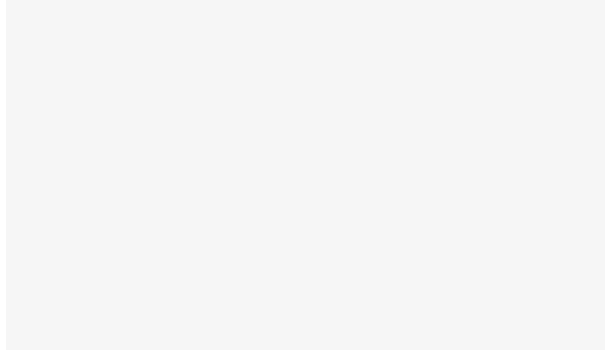


Using our mistakes as an opportunity for our children to learn is an important part in inoculating them with the ability to overcome the inevitable failures and disappointments that they'll face

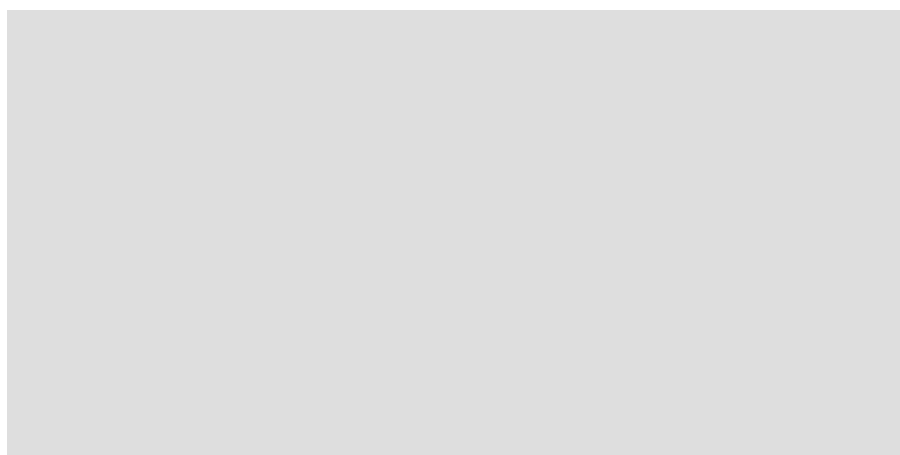
— **Quratulain Zaidi, psychologist**

When we have done something less well than we might have, or failed to do something we should have, or when we have done something we aren't proud of, it provides the opportunity for valuable discussion with our children as to consequences and what we learned from the mistake, and how we will deal with it differently the next time, she says. It also often offers the chance to say sorry.

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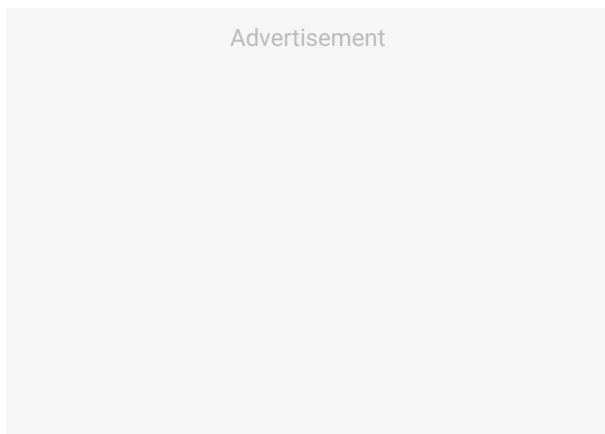


“Showing our children that it’s not just acceptable but honourable and honest to take ownership of our mistakes and fess up to them – and then know how to move on from them – is a really important life lesson. It teaches them to use their own mistakes as launch pads for learning rather than paddles to beat themselves up with,” Zaidi says.

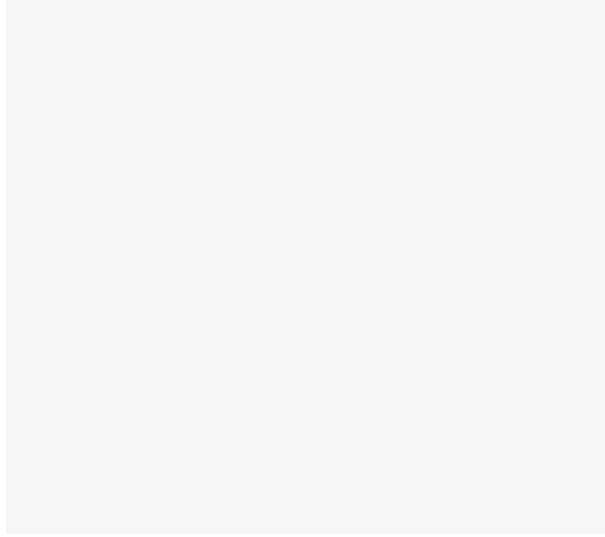


Making mistakes can help children deal with setbacks later in life. Photo: Alamy

Zaidi adds that she sees “many children and teenagers that are not inoculated to deal with setbacks or a perceived sense of failure”. This is tragic because “research shows that learning is enhanced when children make mistakes. It motivates them to try to come up with new strategies”.



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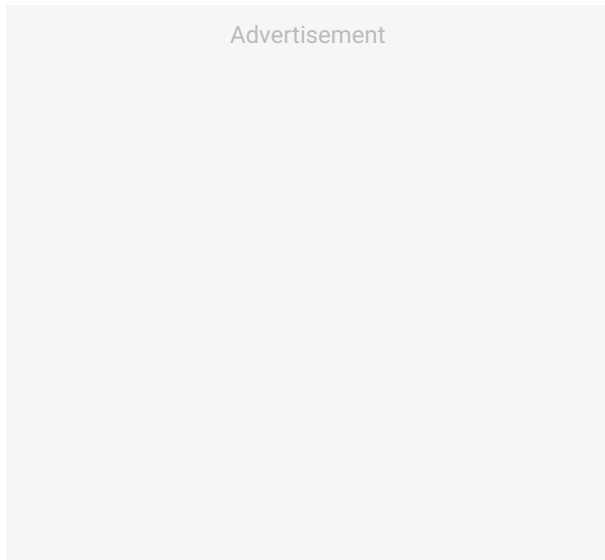


But in our pursuit of the holy grail of perfect parenting we are often so focused on getting it just right for our children that often we don't talk about when we got it wrong; we don't air our own mistakes, and that is a loss – to our children – because “using our mistakes as an opportunity for our children to learn is an important part in inoculating them with the ability to overcome the inevitable failures and disappointments that they'll face. It makes them resilient,” Zaidi says.

### **Hong Kong kids take self-defence classes to fight off school bullies**

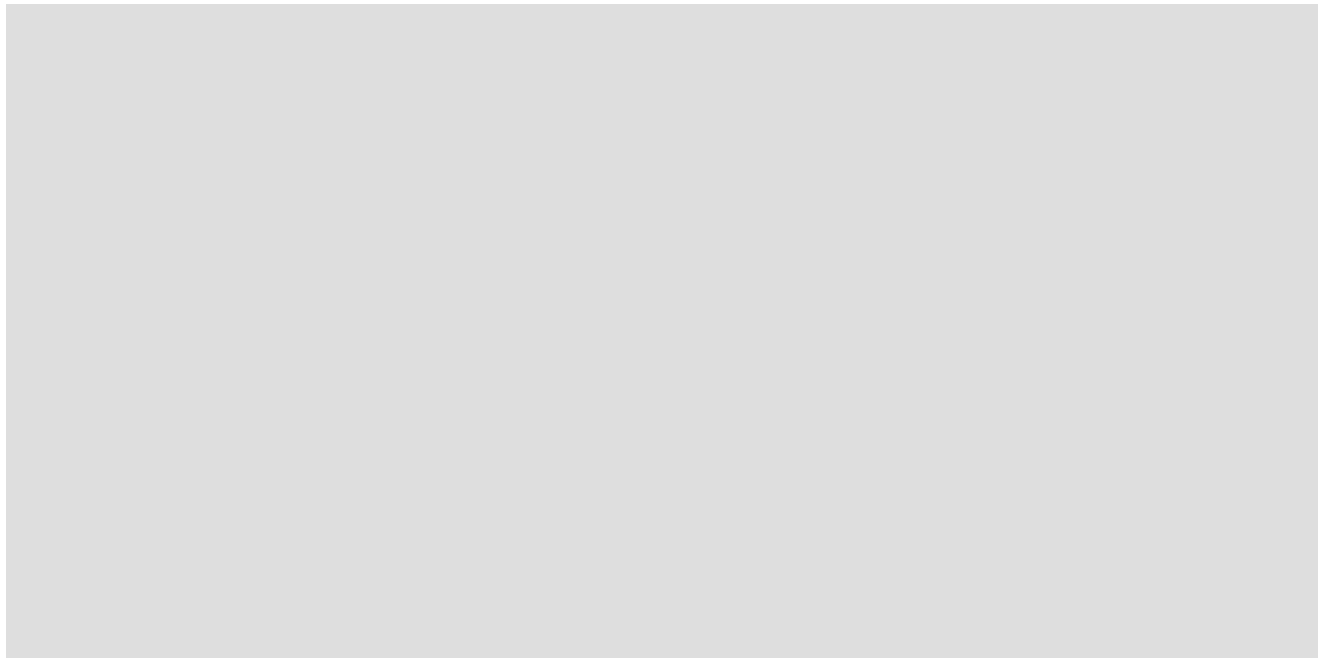
Hong Kong-based child psychologist Lora Lee says adds that unless a child periodically experiences a moderate level of frustration and imperfection, that child cannot develop the much-needed tolerance levels that he or she needs to deal with the real world – which, as grown-ups know, can be deeply frustrating.

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That failure, Lee adds, could be a playground argument, or a missed or failed school assignment, but whatever it is, “we need to help our children cope with mistakes in a safe environment and resist the urge to come to their rescue too quickly”.

And while it can be painful to witness your child struggling, watching them make mistakes, and learning from them, while we’re in the wings to scoop them up and help patch them up, is the right thing to do. “You can’t stop the wave for your child, but you can teach your child how to surf,” Lee says.



It can actually serve your children well if you do occasionally slip up. Photo: Alamy

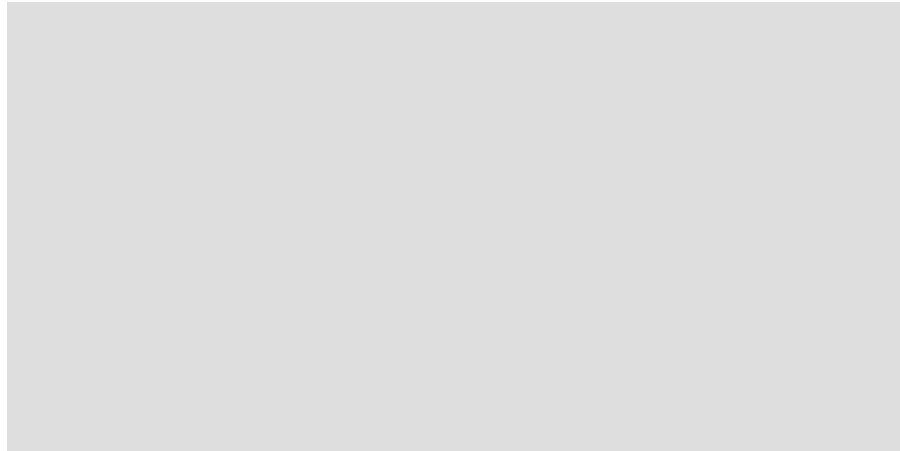
### **Five reasons why you need to make mistakes as a parent**

1. Being connected to your children is more important than aspiring for perfection. If you can't be honest with your children, even about your own mistakes, how will they be honest with you? Communication between parent and child is the best foundation for happy family living and for nurturing sound children.
2. If you never stuff up, you never get the chance to say "sorry". And if you don't, nor will your children. Learning to say sorry and learning that a situation or a relationship can be repaired after a "sorry" is a really important life lesson in your children's future relationships.

### **How Tiger Moms and hovering parents can damage a child's ability to cope with life's challenges**

3. Nobody can sustain perfect forever. It's an unrealistic aspiration, and trying is exhausting and stressful. Your children will lose more on your perfect image than the warts and all version of you that comes with connection and apologies.





Child psychologist Lora Lee.

4. If we don't demonstrate to our children that making mistakes and mending them afterwards is part of everybody's normality, we are imposing upon them an awful burden. Their mistakes, when they come, will feel disproportionately enormous and damaging, and they won't have had the chance to watch you get over yours so they won't understand how to get over their own.

**Will all you monster parents just please stop screaming?**

5. Unless our children understand that it's OK to make mistakes, they'll never understand they can fix those mistakes, which can make them risk-averse. And a life without at least some risk is a life half lived.

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