



FAILURE: A SUCCESSFUL TEACHER

"Blowing it" can be your teenager's best tutor

By Ann Cannon

My son Corey, who has naturally curly, brown hair, wanted straight, blond hair. Usually Corey stripped the color from his hair, leaving it streaked with blond or white highlights.

One day, however, Corey emerged from the bathroom with deep-black hair. Not only was his hair black, but so were his ears and the back of his neck. Usually I could manage to say something positive about a new hair-do. This time I blew up.

A few minutes later Corey found me furiously scrubbing the bathtub and crying.

"Mom, can we talk?" he asked.

"I don't think we have anything to talk about," I resisted, embarrassed about losing control and hurt by his action.

"Mom, please help me. I don't like it either." The anguish in his 16-year-old face told me that was true.

I knew I had the opportunity to lecture on all the reasons he should leave his hair alone ... or try to help him do something about his failed dye-job. I chose to help him.

Failure doesn't have to be final. Wise parents recognize that failure is a natural part of life. Allowing our teenagers to fail can produce some unexpected blessings.

SEEING FAILURE AS A BLESSING

Consider the blessings when your teenager "blows it."

● **The blessing can be useful.** In our home, all dirty clothes in the bathroom hamper return to their owners in a wearable, clean condition. All dirty clothes outside the

hamper don't. After leaving towels lying on his closet floor for a week, Corey finally remembered that long-standing maxim.

"Do you know how hard it is to dry your whole body with a small hand towel?" he asked seriously as he carried his towels to the washer.

● **The blessing can be disciplinary.** As Austin and Sharon went to bed, Austin checked on Jimmy. Instead of finding him in bed, Austin found an open window leading to the carport roof. Austin closed and locked the window and returned downstairs to wait for Jimmy to come home.

When Jimmy found his bedroom window locked, he had to use his front-door key. Neither Sharon nor Austin remembers the punishment. But they vividly remember Jimmy's surprised face when he saw his parents and knew he'd been caught.

● **The blessing can be teachable.** Another long-standing rule in our family involves morning wake-up calls. I'll wake a person one time. The rest is up to that person. Many mornings Corey raced to catch his school bus. But, alas, one day he missed it. Instead of driving him to school with a lecture about getting up on time, I let him face the consequences.

Calling friends to beg for a ride didn't work because they'd already

left for school. He ended up walking the two miles.

Corey learned to heed the clanging alarm clocks he sets all over his room to get him out of bed.

HEALING THE HURT

When failure occurs, work toward healing using these four steps:

1. Accept the reality of failure. We all fail. Allowing your teenager to take a risk and fail helps him or her grow. Accept failure, then move on.

2. Discover why the failure occurred. Was the failure yours or your teenager's? What needs were being ignored? Bobby did drugs to gain his parents' attention. Could his parents have met his needs in a more positive way?

3. Include your teenager in the learning. Help your teenager pinpoint what can be learned from failure. Celebrate those lessons.

4. Work together toward a solution. Create a list of possible solutions. Choose one and implement it. Together, keep trying until you find a solution that works.

While there are no easy answers, don't let failure be final. ■

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