

why failure is an f-word to teenagers

TRENDS

For many failure-sheltered teenagers, the hardest thing they've ever had to face is getting rejected by their first-choice college or university. In fact, according to a report in U.S. News & World Report, the college application process is the first experience of failure for many students.

According to U.S. News reporter Marianne Szegedy-Maszak, today's teenagers fear failure more than previous generations because they're "highly driven, successful, and the recipients of an aggressive self-esteem agenda enforced by well-meaning parents and schools." In the name of positive, encouraging support, adults have unwittingly stolen a childhood treasure from their kids.

"This generation of parents has been so focused on doing things for their children, so worried about their children not being happy or successful, that these children are not allowed to fail along the way," says Ruth Peters, a Florida clinical psychologist and author of *Overcoming Underachieving*. "And depriving children of the experience of healthy failure is doing them a terrible disservice."

Karen Reivich, co-director of the University of Pennsylvania's Resiliency Project, says adults have gotten things backwards. "They think a child must grow up succeeding, and when they succeed they will feel good about themselves." The truth is, says Reivich, that "healthy failure and healthy frustration" produce what psychologists call "mastery" in young people.