



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2015 Fall Speaker: Jessica Lahey

Sidwell Friends School

November 4, 2015

The Parents Council of Washington welcomed author, educator and speaker Jessica Lahey to present to an audience of over 400 on the necessity and benefit of allowing our children to fail. Participants included PCW member school administrators, parents and teachers, as well as members of the general public. Audience interest and reception were strong throughout the evening. Sally Selby, Middle School Principal, welcomed attendees on behalf of Sidwell Friends School, the host of the event.

In her presentation, as in her recent book *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*, Lahey provided tangible parenting guidance. She encouraged parents not to step in every time children experience disappointment and frustration, but instead allow them to learn from mistakes and setbacks and grow into successful, resilient and self-reliant adults.

Lahey discussed how we have helped paralyze our children by shielding them from failure and risk-taking. She advocated moving away from extrinsic short-term rewards, honors, treats and bribes, while fostering intrinsic motivation. Based on current research and practice, it is clear that the best way to motivate students to own their education is through intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation. Further, the motivation that comes from within is the key to enabling students to develop grit, resilience and find their own strength.

While entertaining and educating the audience with personal anecdotes about her students and sons, Lahey highlighted various parenting takeaways:

Children do not learn well when stressed; instead of over-scheduling and hovering, we can help them more by giving them room to choose their own path.

It is okay – and it is good – for children to experience small and reasonable failures, and learn from those experiences. We can promote their success by discouraging our constant intervention.

Education should not value getting the correct answer, but learning to navigate and solve problems to get to an acceptable solution. Creativity and problem solving are necessary.

- Acquiring intrinsic motivation requires three things:
 - Autonomy or control over the task at hand.
 - Competence, achieved by repeated successful problem solving.
 - Ongoing interpersonal connections.
- Children need encouragement for effort, not labels like “smart” or “gifted.”
- Invest in hard work; the harder we work, the smarter we become.
- Talk with your child about school, but trust them to take control of their grades.
- Let children set their own goals; they will be more engaged in reaching the goals.
- Give them room; step back and allow opportunities to fail, rebound and develop resilience.

In addition to these and other parenting insights, Lahey referenced the following books as useful resources:

- Daniel Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*
- Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*
- Wendy Grolnick, *The Psychology of Parental Control: How Well-Meant Parenting Backfires*
- James M. Lang, *Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty (kids don't cheat on tasks for which they are intrinsically motivated)*

Jessica Lahey's work appears regularly in *The Atlantic* and on Vermont Public Radio, together with her bi-weekly advice column for the *New York Times*. She earned her

J.D., with concentrations in juvenile and education law, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Lahey resides with her family in New Hampshire.

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- Author, New York Times bestseller *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*
- Columnist, New York Times “The Parent-Teacher Conference”
- Contributing Writer, *The Atlantic*
- Commentator, Vermont Public Radio