

# 3 Important Questions Parents Should Ask To Help Their Child Reflect on Poor Decisions

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Watching your child make poor decisions or fail can make you feel helpless, angry and sad. You worry about everything from your child's self-esteem and social development to their future success; but failure is an opportunity to get your child to look at himself and to learn an important lesson. The lesson might be about the true cost of cutting corners, what happens when he doesn't do his best at something, or what the real consequences are for not being productive. Allowing your child to feel some discomfort from failure (ie. fear, worry, disappointment, and experiencing consequences for their actions) puts them in a position to develop some important coping skills. It can help them learn to avoid similar situations in the future and helps them learn how to manage situations that make them feel uncomfortable or frustrated. Whether dealing with feelings of discomfort or feelings of failure, there are three simple questions parents can ask their child to help them process the situation and to help them develop these important coping skills. The following example relates to academics, but these questions can be used any time your child makes poor decisions.

## 1. ***“What part did you play in this?”***

That's what you want your child to learn, because that's all he can change. The lesson stems from there. Your child might say, “I don't know what part I played, Dad.” You can respond by saying, “Well, let's think about it. Where did you get off track? Where did things go wrong for you?” If your child doesn't know, you can say, “Well, it seems to me you got off track when you didn't have your homework ready when your teacher called on you. The part you played was not being prepared. And the solution to that is getting prepared.” Your child may agree with you, or he may try to offer some defense. But any defense that's offered is not going to be legitimate as long as you're speaking in the context of “What part did you play?” You just need to point out, “Well, it seems to me like you're making an excuse for not having your homework done.” Or “Seems to me you're blaming me for not having your homework done.” Or “It looks to me like you're blaming your teacher for not having your homework done.”—whatever the case may be.

## 2. ***“What are you going to do differently next time?”***

Ask your child, “What are you going to do differently the next time when you have to do your homework?” Or “What are you going to do differently next time so that if your teacher calls on you and you don't have your work done, you won't get embarrassed?” Or “What are you going to do differently next time to pass the test?” This is a big question in this conversation with your child, because it gets him to see other, healthier ways of responding to the problem.

## 3. ***“What did you learn from this?”***

“What did you learn from being embarrassed when your teacher called on you and you didn't have your homework done?” “What did you learn from not passing the test because you didn't prepare?” Put the responsibility back on your child. If you take his responsibility over, it's just going to become a power struggle.