**Does Suffering Make Us Stronger and Lead to Success?**

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The writer Alfie Kohn challenges the [drumbeat of critics](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/25/opinion/losing-is-good-for-you.html) who contend that kids these days get too many rewards, from stickers to trophies, without truly earning them. He disputes the commonly held notion that suffering and conditionally granting awards (e.g., trophies only for the winners) prepare children for real life and teach them resilience.

What do you think? Does experiencing frustration and defeat help us develop grit? Does suffering make us stronger and eventually lead to success? Or are those just myths?

In [“Do Our Kids Get Off Too Easy?,”](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/04/opinion/sunday/do-our-kids-get-off-too-easy.html) Alfie Kohn writes:

The conventional wisdom these days is that kids come by everything too easily — stickers, praise, A’s, trophies. It’s outrageous, we’re told, that all kids on the field may get a thanks-for-playing token, in contrast to the good old days, when recognition was reserved for the conquering heroes.

Children are said to be indulged and overcelebrated, spared from having to confront the full impact of their inadequacy. There are ringing declarations about the benefits of frustration and the need for grit.

These themes are sounded with numbing regularity, yet those who sound them often adopt a self-congratulatory tone, as if it took extraordinary gumption to say pretty much what everyone else is saying. Indeed, this fundamentally conservative stance on children and parenting has become common even for people who are liberal on other issues.

But seriously, has any child who received a trinket after losing a contest walked away believing that he (or his team) won — or that achievement doesn’t matter? Giving trophies to all the kids is a well-meaning and mostly innocuous attempt to appreciate everyone’s effort.

Even so, I’m not really making a case for doing so, since it distracts us from rethinking competition itself and the belief that people can succeed only if others fail.

Rather, my intent is to probe the underlying cluster of mostly undefended beliefs about what life is like (awful), what teaches resilience (experiences with failure), what motivates people to excel (rewards) and what produces excellence (competition).

… But when you point out the absence of logic or evidence, it soon becomes clear that trophy rage is less about prediction — what will happen to kids later — than ideology: — how they ought to be treated now. …

* **Does experiencing frustration and defeat help us develop grit? Does suffering make us stronger and eventually lead to success? Or do you agree with Mr. Kohn that those are just unsubstantiated myths?**
* **How do children develop unconditional self-esteem: “a solid core of belief in yourself, an abiding sense that you’re competent and worthwhile — even when you screw up or fall short”? What can parents, teachers and coaches do to help young people believe in themselves?**
* **One of our most-commented on Student Opinion questions last year was on a similar topic:** [**Do we give children too many trophies?**](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/26/do-we-give-children-too-many-trophies/) **Or do you think participation trophies are a good way to boost children’s self-confidence? Why?**