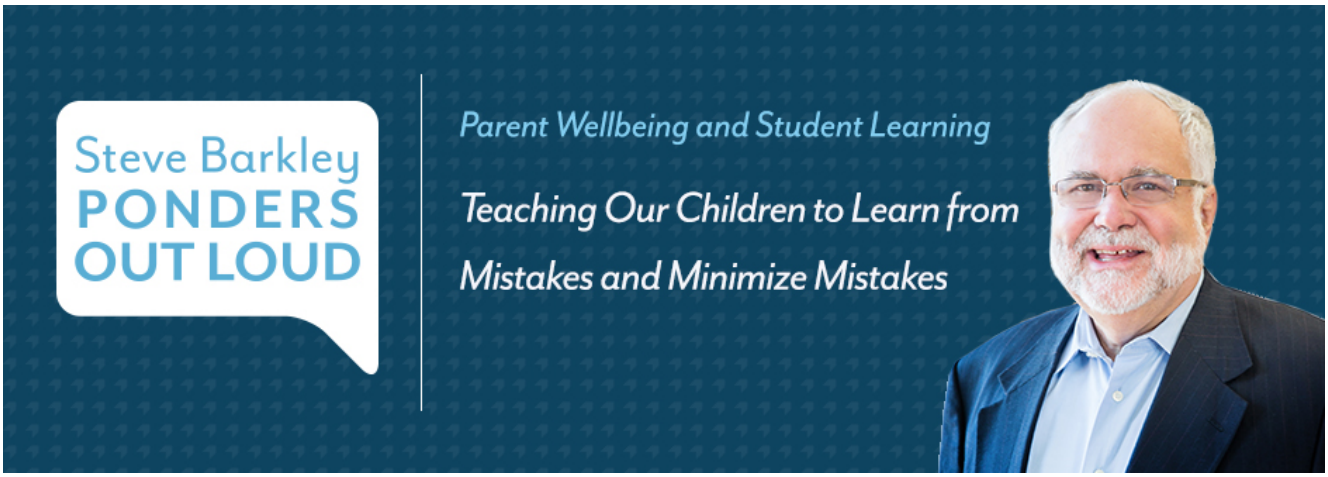
Podcast for Parents: Teaching Our Children to Learn From Mistakes and Minimize Mistakes



Author, Colleen Cruz, presents a clear strategy for dealing with our parenting mistakes and our children's mistakes. She and Steve explore and laugh about the mistakes we all make while parenting and how we can coach our own continuous development.

Find Colleen's book, "Risk. Fail. Rise" here.

Visit Colleen's website here.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPTSteve [Intro]: 00:00 Hello, and welcome to the parents as learning coaches edition of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. Parents and caregivers play many different roles, at times, even somewhat conflicting roles as they support children's development. The pandemic has shown a light on the importance of parents supporting learners. In this podcast, I'll look to share my experiences as a teacher,

educator, parent, grandparent, and continuous learner that can support your coaching efforts.
Steve: 00:30 Teaching our children to learn from mistakes and minimize mistakes. Joining us on the podcast today is Colleen Cruz. She's a parent, teacher, teacher trainer, and the author of a book titled, "Risk. Fail. Rise: A teacher's guide to Learning From Mistakes." Welcome, Colleen.

Colleen: 00:56 Thank you. I'm excited to be here.
Steve: 00:58 I'm wondering if you'd start by telling us a little bit about the title of your book, "Risk. Fail. Rise: A teacher's guide to Learning From Mistakes."

Colleen: 01:08 The title comes from – the original working title of the book was called "Wrongology" or "It's All Your Fault" and as a parent, I think a lot of us can relate to that idea, it's all your fault, which is probably why I clung to that title for so long beause I just feel like it's all my fault. But in the end, we thought nobody wants to be walking around holding a book saying it's all my fault. But secondly, I think more accurately, we know that if we want to learn, that we need to take risks and that when we take risks, if the learning that we're going to do is going to be big learning, we're going to fail. And it's only in that failure that we can actually rise. And it's as much, if not more about the adults doing the risking, the failing and the rising than it is about the kids.

Steve: 02:07 So how would you describe the mindset that we as parents would want our children to develop around mistake making?

Colleen: 02:19 Well, so one of the things that I learned in writing this book was that what I had been doing for decades as an educator and as a parent was wrong about how to teach kids about mistakes. I certainly thought I was doing the right thing. Like, my own child would make a mistake and I would have a talk with them and we would do an autopsy on it. And we

would spend a lot of time sometimes I would even send them into the other room to think about it and reflect on it, right? And like, I thought I was being so good cause I was, you know, not using the rod but what research has shown is that the best way to repeat a mistake is to react strongly to it and to reflect on it and perseverate on it, that it's almost like you're creating a pathway in your mind to repeat it. So like, if you've ever like, let's say mispronounced a person's name or taken the wrong turn on the way someplace, if you beat yourself up about it, you're going to repeat it again and again and again.

Steve: 03:27 Actually increases the odds that you do, huh?

Colleen: 03:29 Yes. Yes. And that blew me away because I have been spending all these years teaching my students, I'm sure the parents
right now are just filled with trust in me right now, but I'm admitting this – this is a thing I did and they might've done too. And I would spend so much time teaching kids to reflect on their mistake. What I learned is that reflection is good if it's quick. So if you make a mistake, you know, if it's just you alone making a mistake or it's a mistake that there is no victim in the mistake, right? Obviously, if there's a victim involved in apology has to be a part of it. But if it's just a mistake that you make, the first move you want to make is like, see it, notice the mistake, take a moment to reflect on it.

Colleen: 04:18 But the bigger thing, if you don't want to repeat the mistake is to, instead of ground yourself on what you did wrong, to ground yourself in your values. Like, what is it that you were – or your goals? Like what was I supposed to be doing? Or on my way to this, I made this kind of mistake. So for example, if you know, I was making dinner and this, this has happened to me. I was making dinner and my kids were getting in a fight in the living room and I got frustrated and I went into the living room and I, you know,

tried to break up the fight and I give them a big speech and did exactly what I shouldn't be doing. And by the time I got back to the kitchen, I burned dinner.

Steve: 05:13 [laughter]

Colleen: 05:13 [laughter] This may or may not have really happened.

Colleen: 05:14 And then my reaction to it, of course, just to make it worse is I then snap at the kids, like, "you made me doing dinner!"
Right? That situation, when I realized, when I calmed down and realized, I made the mistake of burning dinner, like, I could go into a whole thing of like all the millions of things that could go that went wrong, but that's not helpful for me to not repeat it. What I should do instead of saying "what is my value?" And if I really look at it, my value is family togetherness. The reason I'm making dinner is I want us to sit down as a family and have dinner together. The reason I went into break up that fight was because I wanted my children to get along with each other and family togetherness. And if I ground myself and really think about, no, I am the kind of person who values family harmony and togetherness, and our time spent together being filled with fun and joy and love.

Colleen: 06:09 Then the next time I hear that fight, I'm going to ask myself, how can I make the harmony happen or how can I make the togetherness happen? Maybe I should pause instead of flying in there and let them try to work it out a little bit. Maybe if togetherness and family time is so important to me, maybe I should settle what I'm doing in here first so that the meal isn't also ruined. And so the next time the fight happens, it'll almost be a trigger. The failure will be a trigger to remind me of my value as opposed to my mistake.

Steve: 06:48 That is an awesome example. Thank you so much. I am – beyond this podcast, I want to be sharing that with

people. I'm hearing two things. One, I'm hearing the depth of of beliefs and values that you're checking in with. And then I'm also hearing it's more if you called it reflection, it's more reflection on what you want rather than reflection on what happened.

Colleen: 07:20 Exactly. And I think in our doing that and I do — I'm getting better at this with my kid is like, with both of my kids is like saying, "oh, you know what? I did dah dah… but what I really wanted or what is so important to us as a family is… And so going forward, I'm going to…" So when my son leaves his backpack in the middle of the walkway, you know, instead of — by the way, I'm going to say this, knowing that this is a hard thing to do, but it actually fixes it. So taking the extra time is worth it. If my son leaves his backpack in the middle of the walkway, in the living room, in our tiny Brooklyn apartment, my instinct is to give him a speech about leaving his backpack and all of that.

Colleen: 08:16 But if instead I stopped and said, "hey, remember you were saying the other day that you really want our family to be calm and peaceful and our home to be happy like that," when the backpack is there on the ground, what do you think is happening with that? And like, he doesn't even need me to say anything else. He's like, "oh my gosh." Because he can imagine the chain of events. And so he sees even something as small as hanging up his backpack as being part of his value of his goal that he wants as opposed to he's somehow just messing it up.

Steve: 08:56 That sounds like a big life skill for kids to develop.

Colleen: 09:01 Yeah. I wish I had developed it when I was younger. Yeah. And it's a beautiful opportunity for families, right? Because you can really, you know, whether you're raising your kid by yourself or with other adults you know, sitting and thinking like what are our values and letting the

values guide us in our responses. And then also quite frankly, you know, all parents know that there are certain things we're supposed to ignore, right? People say, just ignore this and pay attention to that. But sometimes it's hard to know as a parent, what do we ignore and what do we respond to? And if we look at well, this mistake has nothing to do with our family values and it isn't going to make a difference whether or not it repeats or doesn't repeat, but this mistake is, then it helps us prioritize.

Steve: 10:03 I had a question here that I was going to ask you about how that mindset that we're looking to develop changes as kids are teenagers and young adults. And I'm kind of thinking, so let me float my thinking out and then you steer me. But I'm kind of thinking as I've been listening to you, it's a common mindset that we're looking to create there that, especially that mindset of thinking about my beliefs and that future picture, and maybe it's as the child matures, I'm looking for them to to do this more on their own, less guided, but it's really the same thinking process.

Colleen: 10:51 Yeah. I mean, I will say as somebody who's working on it still as an adult, I think it's a lifelong journey to be – it's another form of mindfulness, of noticing and then staying grounded.

Steve: 11:08 Great description. Mindfulness. Yeah.

Colleen: 11:08 Yeah. And it's, you know, I think, as they say, bigger kids, bigger problems. You know, the knee jerk – my own parents were very good parents of teenagers and I think a lot of it was because my mother was very good at just listening and letting me kind of talk things out. And I think that if we set the stage to our own modeling of when we make a mistake, so like with a teenager, I don't know who doesn't have a response that they're not proud of with a teenager on occasion.

Colleen: 11:52 I think when that happens, we snap at them, we overreact, we get sarcastic, whatever we do. And then we pause and we model, you know, what? I just tore your head off and like that goes against my values and you kind of talk it through. I think that that is important. I think it shows kids that, and I think we should also model it in, you know, when we're watching the news or when we're making choices about whether or not to go to this protest or that protest, or whether we are listening to friends and family. So, I mean, the pandemic is filled with stories we can talk about around mistakes and values. And then when kids become teenagers and when they are teenagers, they're used to seeing that part of adulthood is talking about mistakes and also talking about our values. And I think that teenagers who are truly grounded in their values and in their goals are less likely to make the types of mistakes that can be life derailing because they are going to have that mindfulness at the front of their mind, as opposed to that dichotomy of right and wrong that sometimes it's easy to get into because it feels so clear, but in many ways it can be more confusing.

Steve: 13:16 The phrase I'm hanging on to is, if I make a mistake, especially a mistake in how I'm dealing with my child or in my case, now my grandkids, my ability to stop and unpack that mistake out loud so that they could hear me go through that thinking. You know, this is what I really wanted and what I really wanted didn't come out as what I said. So let me back up and talk about what I really wanted and then we can talk about how we make that happen.

Colleen: 13:51 Yeah. And I think, you know, we can do this in planful ways. Like, my mother was very good about telling me stories about her own decisions. And I remember one day she was watching me, she was picking me up from some high school event and I saw her kind of watching me, but I really – it wasn't until, probably until adulthood that I figured out was happening. When I got in the car, she just said, "how you

doing?" And then I was like, "fine." And then she started telling me a story about how she wants told gossip about a friend. And she just told – it seemed like it was totally unrelated. And in that moment, she was just saying, "and I realized, like, that's not the kind of friend I wanted to be." And then she went on about like what we were going to have for dinner.

Colleen: 14:40 She did not talk about me at all. But later on, like much later, I think she was in the kitchen doing something and walked in and was like, "can I tell you this story?" And I basically told the story about me getting in a fight with my friend because of gossip. But like, she had set the stage. And so, even if you didn't just make a mistake, you can tell stories about times you've made mistakes and I think the craft of it is to not is to not always say, "you know, I just saw you do this thing. Let me tell you a time about the story," but rather just these stories come up naturally. If you notice a kid, you know, if you're concerned about your child drinking or you're concerned about the way that they're studying or whatever it is, like, telling a story from your own life and your own realizations, and then, you know, even asking for their input, like, "what would you have told 15 year old me if I had done this? What would you suggest to 17 year old me?" I think that that is powerful work to do.

Steve: 15:49 Well. Colleen, thank you. Thank you so much. Just want to tell folks where they could find your book or how they might touch base with you if they have a follow-up question.

Colleen: 16:00 Yeah. So I am on all the social media platforms, but probably the one I'm most active on is on Twitter. And my handle is my name, @colleen_cruz and you can find me and the things I post. I write for educators but this particular book is more of a crossover book. So while you will see educator examples, it is firmly grounded in parenting. And if you go to my Twitter feed and my Instagram feed, you will also see it's pretty parent centric. So you can go there, you

can go to my website. You can also go to my publisher heinemann.com, which has the book, the audio book, and different blog posts and free stuff that you can that you can check out.

Steve: 16:55 Well thanks, Colleen. We'll stick the links to those in the lead-in to the podcast. Really appreciate you joining us.

Colleen: 17:04 Thank you so much.

Steve [Outro]: 17:06 Thank you for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud on iTunes and Podbean. And please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter @stevebarkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.