

# The Dignity of Risk

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It would be much easier to bubble-wrap children than allow them to fail, but it is often in taking a risk that learning occurs.

Risk is a part of success. All accomplishments come from some level of risk-taking. It's how people learn.

"You first learn to walk by falling down," said Judith Holt, director of the Interdisciplinary Training Division at Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities.

"You fall down a lot. Eventually, you learn things to keep from falling. You will never learn balance unless you fall. You don't learn unless you have experience. You don't gain experience without failure.

"We all learn by making choices, and sometimes that doesn't end up to our benefit," she said.

Parents want to see their child succeed, but often do whatever they can to reduce the risk to the child. For parents of people with intellectual disabilities, the need to protect is higher, as the expectations become lower. Trying to keep everything in a little bubble becomes the focus, Holt said.

"Risk is better in terms of learning. We're not talking about unreasonable risk, but the risks you learn from," Holt said. "If we don't let people with disabilities take risks, we are denying them what it means to be human. To be human, you need agency. You need opportunities. It's hard for a parent to let go of any child, but to let go of a child with a disability, it's even harder."

Allowing people with disabilities to take reasonable risks is part of treating them as the adults they are. Allowing risks does not mean being unsafe, or setting them up to fail. It means providing them with the opportunities to experience new things, to discover their strengths and use them to achieve what they never thought possible.

"We don't want to throw them off the deep end," Holt said. "We want to let them stretch, to do new things. There will be failure. There's a certain dignity to that."