

Mistake jars

Many children worry about making mistakes and often avoid tasks that are difficult for them as a result. This activity provides an experiential and concrete way of understanding the role of mistakes in learning and helps normalize mistakes, with the aim of reducing a child's anxiety about this.

MATERIALS

- » You will need two large jars and some stickers or a marker to label these. You will also need something to fill them—you can choose counters, coins or stones, or if you prefer you can keep some paper and a pen by the jars.

PROCEDURE

Explain to the child that you are wondering about how they learn things. You may like to provide some developmentally appropriate examples, such as learning to read or learning to swim. If the child doesn't voluntarily talk about mistakes ask about these and whether they help or make learning harder.

Suggest that you do an experiment in which you label two jars, one for mistakes and one for learning (see the *Mistake jars example* opposite). Agree that everyone in the family will put a coin or counter in the appropriate jar when they make a mistake or learn something new. Alternatively, they could write down what they learnt or the mistake they made and put the paper in the appropriate jar.

Model how this is done by thinking of something you have learnt and a mistake you have made. Encourage the child to have a turn too. If the child's parents are in the session they can contribute at this time or may want to add to this later when you explain the experiment to them.

FOR PARENTS

Ensure that parents are aware of the aim of the experiment and know to watch for lots of learning so that the jars end up at least being even or the learning jar is fuller. Ask that the family bring the jars back to the next session so you can review what happened.

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Younger children can be supported to benefit from this activity if their parents can help to draw out what the mistake they have made is and what the associated learning is, putting a token in each jar at the same time. Older children should be able to manage this more flexibly, having a greater awareness that the tokens in each jar will build over time and not necessarily needing each mistake or learning to be directly associated.

VARIATION

This activity can be easily adapted to working with a set of scales, weighing mistakes on one side and learning on the other. If you roll balls of play-doh or similar to represent the mistakes and learning, you can increase the complexity and talk about big versus little mistakes and different kinds of learning. This is often helpful for older children who are more able to understand that when learning something that is very new or very complex, you are likely to make a larger number of mistakes.



Mistake jars example