“It’s no use crying over spilled milk”
By Melissa Switek, M.A., NCC, LPC-A

I recently heard a story about a famous scientist who had made several very important medical breakthroughs. In an interview with a newspaper reporter the scientist was asked why he thought he was able to be so much more creative than the average person. He responded that it all came from an experience with his mother, which occurred when he was around two years old. He was trying to remove a bottle of milk from the refrigerator, when he lost his grip and it fell, spilling all over the kitchen floor. When his mother came into the kitchen, instead of giving him a lecture or yelling at him, she said, “What a wonderful mess you have made! Well, the damage has already been done. Would you like to get down and play in the milk before we clean it up?” Indeed, he did.

After a few minutes his mother said, “Whenever you make a mess like this, eventually you have to clean it up and restore everything to its proper order. So how would you like to do that? We could use a sponge, a mop, or a towel.” He chose the sponge and together they cleaned up the spilled milk. His mother then said, “You know what we have here is a failed experiment in how to effectively carry a big bottle of milk with two little hands. Let’s go in the backyard and see if you can discover a way to carry it without dropping it.” The little boy learned that if he grasped the bottle at the top near the lip, he could carry it without dropping it. What a wonderful lesson!

Sometimes, we all need a reminder that we do not need to be afraid to make mistakes. Mistakes give us opportunities to learn something new. We all owe it to ourselves and to our children to have permission to struggle and make mistakes as we learn and grow. It is important that we refrain from taking these learning opportunities away from our children by rushing to “clean up the mess” ourselves. During child centered play therapy the therapist allows the child to lead and returns the responsibility, to complete age appropriate tasks, to the child. With time, the child gains a sense of self-efficacy that boosts his or her self-esteem. Once a child learns that he or she is capable, the possibilities are endless.

For more information about Play Therapy:
Visit the Association for Play Therapy website at www.a4pt.org
Read Dibs: In Search of Self by Virginia M. Axline
Read Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship by Garry L. Landreth