



Help Your Children Develop Independence

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When your children are young, they depend on you for their every need. Sometimes it's difficult for you to sit back and watch them develop their own independence. It might be tough but ***when you allow your child to make his or her own mistakes and learn life lessons early, they'll grow into happy and healthy adults.***

The best thing you can do is to find a balance because you don't want to allow your child too much independence too early. You want to be able to watch your child develop independence from the sidelines so you can step in when needed.

Consider these tips as you nudge your child towards an independent life:

- 1. Let them make choices.** While you don't want your children making all the decisions, it's important to ***allow them to make certain choices from time to time.*** Even as young toddlers you can give them opportunities to choose and develop independence.
 - Allow your children their own meal choices.
 - Let them pick some family activities.
 - Let them choose toys and pursue their own hobbies.
 - Allow them to dress themselves as long as their choices are appropriate.
- 2. Work on social skills.** A large part of independence is learning how to effectively communicate. Improper communication skills can hold your child back. Children of all ages can work on developing better social skills.
 1. Reinforce the idea of sharing with young children.
 2. Teach your children appropriate ways to make friends.
 3. Teach them how to be polite and to use good manners.

3. Life lessons. It's always a good idea to work on life lessons. This can be done early as well. Your children don't need you to treat them as if you'll always be there to take care of their every need. While you should always be there for them emotionally, ***teach them that you won't solve every problem for them.***

- Assign age appropriate chores to your children.
- Provide them with rewards for a job well done.
- Teach your children time management and problem solving skills.

Young Children

When you create a good learning environment for your children right from the beginning, they'll start to develop independence on their own. They'll learn to crawl to you and walk to you.

It's important to give them opportunities to learn on their own early on. If they attend daycare, they'll work on these skills during the day while you're at work. If not, it might be a good idea to attend a local playgroup so your child can get to know others their age.

During these opportunities, let them do as they please while you watch from the sidelines. Let them play and only step in when needed. If your child begins to fight with another child over a toy, step in momentarily to reinforce the idea of sharing.

Whenever your child shows positive social skills, remember it together and reward them for their good behavior.

Older Children

Older children present a different set of parenting requirements. You might be scared as they face life's tough decisions, but ***in the end you need to trust that they'll make the right choices.*** After all, you can't make decisions for them, but you'll probably realize that your kids are smarter than you think!

In these circumstances, all you can do is work to keep the lines of communication open. As your children are growing up, have the tough conversations with them and let them know that you can be relied upon for your love and support.

Trust your children, but monitor them closely if you do have suspicions of negative activities. You shouldn't encroach on their personal space, but there are still things you can do, such as keep track of their online activities and ask them where they're going, with whom, and when they'll be back. Set rules and curfews to help them make good choices.

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