

## Competence and Independence

Raising independent and self motivated children is undoubtedly a primary goal all parents have. Providing the best opportunities for children to practise becoming independent can be confusing at most ages, whether it be encouraging a 3 year old to choose what to wear, expecting a 6 year old to carry their own bag in to school, to allowing teens to manage their money and make decisions concerning who they spend time with. How do we know as parents when to hang on and when to let go?

Have you heard the terms “helicopter parenting” or “over nurturing”? These par-ents limit the possibilities of their child becoming an effective decision maker, a problem solver and self reliant, maintaining dependence on parents.

For example, the adult might:

- Take care of a small cut for a 16 year old
- Carry school bag and sort locker for a 12 year old
- Cut meat into small pieces for an 11 year old
- Dress a 9 year old for school

Does helping in this way give children a message that they are incompetent? Is incompetence a message we want to deliver to our children?

If parents overwork on the child’s behalf, the child will underwork. To achieve the ultimate goal of independence in our children we begin to teach, step by step the skills the child needs. The child’s increasing abilities, along with the desire to do things their own way, sometimes creates conflict with adults. This is as it should be. The child must learn to deal with the frustration of not always having things go their way. Children become confident when they are sure of their skills and capabilities. How can children become confident if they do not get plenty of op-portunitites to learn to do things for themselves, make mistakes and learn from them under the safe and watchful eye of caring adults? Does it matter if we don't like their choice of clothes when they are learning to dress themselves, or if the bedding is not perfectly straight when they make their bed? What message are we giving our children when we go in and fix it up?

Striking the balance between when to take responsibility as the parent and when to put the responsibility on the child is difficult. One way to address this dilemma **is to not do for your child what he/she can do for himself/herself**. It may compromise the belief in themselves as someone who is competent with a strong desire to become increasingly independent.

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