

Fostering Independence: What Parents Can Do

Fostering independence in children is important because it enables the child to develop the skills and confidence necessary for decision making. Independence may also promote social development, allowing children to create appropriate relationships with adults and other children. Independent children exude enthusiasm and optimism. They can set goals and work to achieve those goals. They learn the cause and effect of their behavior, such as studying in order to pass a test. They also learn that in order to succeed at a new activity, they will need to practice it.

Of course, depending on others is normal at some developmental stages. For example, young children need their parents to provide them with basic needs- food, clothing, and transportation. But dependency becomes a concern when the child begins to rely on others to make decisions, complete personal responsibilities, or for self-help skills. A child's development of self-reliance can be nurtured by parents avoiding doing for the child what the child is capable of doing for himself/herself. When the child sets goals and strives to reach these goals, his/her confidence and self-esteem is supported.

Strategies to Encourage Independence:

- Provide for age-appropriate supervision of a child's play.
 - Allow your child to make his/her own choices during play. (eg. drawing a red sky and blue grass is OK 😊)
- Encourage independence in activities.
 - The child's attempts to get others to do tasks for which he/she is responsible should be ignored, while praise and encouragement should be given promptly for any attempt made to complete tasks independently.
- Honor your child's decisions when possible.
 - Give your child freedom to choose between two acceptable choices, since fear of criticism or failure is removed when both choices are acceptable. Gradually extend the choices as your child becomes more confident.
- Encourage self-reliance
 - Support the child's completion of a responsibility, such as cleaning the room and making the bed.
 - The child should be praised for the process of completing the task rather than solely for the final result.
- Foster social development by allowing the child to choose friends and activities.
- Assist the child in developing problem-solving skills, such as finding solutions in arguments or difficulties.
 - Interceding every time your child has a problem will not help him/her learn to resolve conflict. Instead, allow your child to confront all reasonable conflict using his/her own growing resources.
- Expose the child to new situations with enough support to promote success.
 - Success will encourage independence while failure will encourage dependence.
- Expect the child to do well and make good choices.
- Help the child set achievable goals and work toward achieving those goals

- Teach your child that mistakes are opportunities to learn
- Respect the uniqueness of each child!
- Assure your child of your love.

Adapted from: National Association of School Psychologists Handout "Fostering Independence: Tips for Parents" by Judith, Kennedy EdS.