



Independence In Young Children

It is in every child's best interest to become increasingly independent and self-reliant from an early age. Our concerns about our children too often result in the very opposite of what we set out to do; we inhibit rather than enhance their well-being.

Young children are eager to become masters of themselves and their world just as quickly as they can. When they are thwarted in their attempts to get up and go, to do and be, they may throw tantrums or become pesky and obstinate. This type of behavior might never appear if we encourage young children to take on more independence and responsibility.

Allow your young child to help with tasks, but don't make them too difficult. If the task causes frustration and crying, break it down into smaller parts, so your child can derive satisfaction from achieving some success. As you encourage independent performance in young children you are also doing yourself a favor: the time you spend teaching them now will free you for your own independent activities later on.

Helping with real tasks develops skills that will be needed later on in school and throughout life. Suppose your four-year-old is helping you put away canned fruits and vegetables. If you tell him to put the larger ones on the bottom, you give him the opportunity to perceive and analyze differences in size, shape, and weight. Similarly, if your young daughter is helping you sort the laundry, matching socks and so on, she is learning to discriminate size and color and to understand what a pair is.

Encourage your child's sense of personal responsibility as early as possible. Gradually but thoroughly teach your child to keep his or her room neat by hanging up clothes, putting away shoes, and keeping toys in a particular storage place. Some household chores such as watering plants and straightening magazines are simple enough for even young children to perform. Children soon realize that household tasks are something everyone -both boys and girls - can and should do.

It's important to set limits, but as young children become more independent, parents in turn must gradually increase their children's freedom to try out new ideas, to explore the environment, and to select their own activities, toys, and snacks. If you show your children that you trust them, they will be ready for more responsibility.

Parents of preschoolers should be on the alert for signs that their child is ready to take on responsibility. When a young child wants to "do it myself," it's probably wise to let him or her try. Just because a child hasn't done it before, doesn't mean it can't be done. Children watch and learn

from other children, and sometimes develop skills "behind your back," as it were. If you encourage responsibility, make realistic demands, and praise gains, you and your child will benefit from your youngster's increasing independence.

ENCOURAGING IN CHILDREN A CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Children under age six are often thought to be too self-centered to understand anyone else's point of view or to show genuine concern for others. But studies have shown that children as young as one year of age can feel compassion and empathy for others. Altruistic behavior is an action designed to help someone in distress.

Altruistic tendencies in children-and cooperative behavior in general-are greatly influenced by the attitudes and actions of parents. Give forceful and clear explanations about not hurting others. Explain why a particular behavior is unacceptable (instead of saying, "Stop that!") show Altruism to your children by hugging, kissing and comforting them. Set an example of friendliness and cooperation in the home by your behavior, notice when your child is being cooperative and explain the benefits.

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