

Parenting Tips
Trempealeau County Promoting Safe and Stable Families
By
Cyndy Jacoby, UWEX Family Living Agent

Encouraging Independence

After you zip your first grader's jacket and send him on his way to the bus or after you have helped your ninth grader write his English report, do you feel the warm sense of being needed? How much help can parents provide and still encourage healthy independence? What is the fine line between being too helpful and caring that your child becomes overly dependent and being just supportive enough to help your child develop a sense of self-confidence and independence?

Parents feel both joy and pain as they nurture their children to become independent. They are both proud of their child's progress and yet feel a sense of loss as their children gain skills and confidence to move on and leave us. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, authors of **How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk**, offer six tips that can help parents encourage children to become independent.

1. **Let children make choices.** Choices help children exert some control over their own lives. The key to presenting choices is to offer choices that both parent and child can live with.
2. **Show respect for a child's struggle.** Rather than jumping in to take over when a child struggles, parents might say, "That can be a difficult task, sometimes it helps if you _____." Offer some useful information here.
3. **Don't ask too many questions.** When parents bombard the child with questions, the child feels pressure to answer in a way that will satisfy the parent. Often a child will talk more if parents say, "Good to see you home," rather than "Did you have a good day at school?"
4. **Don't rush to answer questions.** When a child asks questions, he has already done some thinking and is looking for someone to explore more ideas. An appropriate response may be, "That's a good question. What do you think?"
5. **Encourage children to use other sources in their community.** When a child needs help or information, suggest that the child seeks help from another professional, friend, or member of the extended family. When the child eats too many sweets and does not brush his teeth the parent may say, "The dentist may be able to explain how this will affect your teeth at your next check-up."
6. **Don't take away hope.** Childhood fantasies of being a ballerina or a professional football player may not seem possible. But by taking away the dream, the child is deprived of the pleasure of anticipating possibilities. When a child expresses what a parent may feel is an impossible dream, the parent might say, "So you are thinking of becoming someone like Brett Favre. Tell me what you think that would be like." Then it is time for the parent to listen and to pick up on what the child reveals. If the child says he wants to play for the Packers, the parent might say, "So you really like the Packers."

If you wonder if you are doing too much for your child, you may request the handout, "Alternatives to Overindulging at Each Developmental Stage," by contacting Cyndy Jacoby, Trempealeau County UW-Extension Family Living Program, PO BOX 67, Whitehall, WI 54773. **Phone:** 715 - 538-2311, Ext. 209 or toll free 1-877-538-2311, Ext. 209. **Email:** cindy.jacoby@ces.uwex.edu



Family Living Program

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