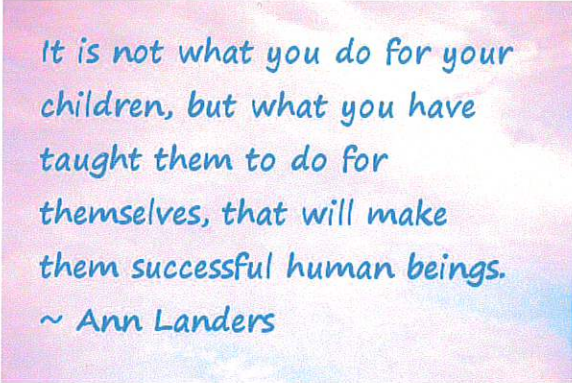


Fostering an Independent Child



It is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves, that will make them successful human beings.
~ Ann Landers

From an early age, a child moves towards independence. How many times has your preschooler pulled away when you were trying to help and declared, "I can do it by myself!"? This desire is a natural process that should be encouraged by parents and caregivers. As an adult, your role in fostering independence is to provide love and support, encourage exploration and curiosity, teach skills, and allow the child to make appropriate choices. Your enthusiasm for your child's exploration sends a message that these activities are valued by you.

Characteristics of an Independent Child

- *Child is enthusiastic and optimistic
- *Child has understanding that success takes practice
- *Child has ability to deal with new situations
- *Child enjoys the satisfaction of accomplishing realistic goals and learning new skills
- *Child is self-reliant and confident
- *Child is resilient and can cope with setbacks

Fostering independence in your child is a process. Baby steps are required. It's the little, daily things that add up to creating a young adult who isn't scared of the world around him and can contribute positively to this world. It is every parent's goal to raise a child who is confident, responsible, empathetic, and happy with who he is. A preschool age child has the drive and desire to begin gaining independence. There are several ways to encourage this independence in your preschool age child.

Strategies to Encourage Independence in your Preschool Age Child

Provide time for free play.

Play dates and scheduled activities are great, but also allow your child to have unstructured play time that allows him to decide how and what to play.

Let your child choose.

Give your child a choice about things whenever possible so he learns to make decisions and feels like his opinion matters. Let him choose between cereal or eggs for breakfast, between two appropriate outfits for school, or which movie to watch with the family.

[Give out chores.](#)

Explain to your child that, in a family, everyone has to work together, and having chores is a part of that. A preschooler can be in charge of picking up his toys after playing, putting his dirty clothes in the hamper, setting the table for meals, clearing his plate and silverware from the table after meals, and making his bed in the morning.

[Encourage your child's self-care.](#) Your child is capable of taking care of many of his self-care needs on his own. Some examples include dressing himself, brushing his teeth, and even starting to wash himself in the bath or shower.

[Listen to your child.](#)

Talk to your preschooler. Ask about his day. Talk about his fears, joys, concerns, favorite movies. Keep the line of communication open now so that it's easier to talk about the big things as he gets older. Asking questions and actually listening to the answers will show your child that he is important and that you care about him and what goes on in his life. This should give him confidence in himself, which makes showing independence easier.

Books about Fostering Independence

[Parenting with Love and Logic](#) by Foster Cline and Jim Fay

[Free-Range Kids](#) by Lenore Skenazy

[Last Child in the Woods](#) by Richard Louv

[The Parent's Journal: Guide to Raising Great Kids](#) by Bobbi Conner