




Building Independence and Responsibility

What we will cover

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- Where we are now
 - Benefits of Building Independence
 - Identifying Opportunities for Independence
 - Planning and Initiating Independent Activities
 - Modeling Independence and Failure
 - Accountability
 - Problem Solving
 - Ideas for Independence
 - Building New Skills in Times of Stress



Where we are now

-We are nearing the end of the school year. Final burst of energy? Burnt out? Identify reasonable expectations.

-Identify areas of needs for all family members. Do you need more help around the house? Do children need more independence during school day and/or around meal times?



Benefits of Building Independence

- Independent children are able to find meaningful and satisfying activities
- Independent children will experience life in a full manner and learn important lessons.
- Independence increases intrinsic motivation in children by finding their own reasons to achieve.
- Good decision-making skills are created from considering various options, while receiving support and guidance from their parents to make their own decisions.
- Independent children believe they are confident and capable of taking care of themselves.



Identifying Opportunities for Independence

- Have a conversation with children about embarking on a new journey. "You're ready to do big-kid jobs"/ "You're ready to take on more responsibility".
- Make a list of things your child could be doing on their own, and ask which they feel they are big enough/responsible enough to take on. Make them part of the process for more buy in.



Planning New Ideas/Responsibilities

- Prioritize ideas
- Do one thing at a time
- Provide opportunities, as well as means/materials, and support
- Provide love, guidance, and encouragement



Beginning Independent Activities

-**Make time:** Allow time for learning curve and mistakes.

-**Negotiate Compromise:** Meet them where they are in control of the activity, split responsibility to start and make it fun!

-**Forget Perfection:** Accept it may not be as “good” as when you do it, allow personal best without criticism and validate feelings around mistakes.

-**Find praise opportunities:** If shoes are on the wrong feet, lead with, “You put your shoes on! Good job!” Discomfort will lead to natural consequence of uncomfortable walking and they can fix it. Praise perseverance!

-**Set goals:** Validate their interests and help learn skills they need for goals or passions

Understanding What is Expected



- Explain what will be expected once new responsibilities embark:** (i.e. give best effort/real try, be responsible, stay committed, be cooperative).
- Go over appropriate coping skills should feelings of frustration or self doubt arise:** Take deep breaths, problem solve, use positive self talk, take a small break, ask for possible solutions but try and complete on their own.
- Explain what your responsibilities will be to help your child succeed as well:** Include responsibilities of other adults in their lives (teachers, coaches, etc.)
- Practice scenarios of frustration before they happen** (i.e. what if this tower of blocks falls over? What will we do?)
- Create schedule** if needed, or appropriate structure.



Model Independence and Making Mistakes

- Be vocal about trying a variety NEW independent activities of your own.
- Allow children to see your thought process. Model confidence, but also express frustration, go over possible solutions, express feelings around failed ideas and pride about successful solutions.
- Everyone makes mistakes, the important thing is to learn from them!

Allow for Failure



- Helping learn how to cope with failure is as important as learning how to succeed
- Not learning how to fail can lead to increased anxiety, and lack of coping skills to deal with inevitable failures
- Empathize and acknowledge feelings around failure
- Come up with solutions to do better next time. Study different? Talk to teacher to clarify topics before test? Balance of acceptance and change.
- Accept and move on, build resilience.
- Slowly expose them to things that aren't perfect. Create rough drafts with misspelled words/sloppy handwriting. Practice making mistakes to see it's not the end of the world



Accountability

- Part of teaching responsibility is teaching children how to be accountable for their actions. It is part of becoming independent.
- Take responsibility for achievements and success the same as mistakes and failures.
- Verbalize process and take shame out of making mistakes, while still acknowledging a different choice could have been made.

Problem-Solving During Resistance

- Try to avoid falling into the either/or, can-she-or-can't-she trap. Almost all situations fall somewhere between can and can't, and the way to find the sweet spot is to validate your child's feeling and move things forward from there:
 - "I know you don't feel up to it, but I'd like you to come anyway. If you're still too exhausted once we get there, we don't have to go in."
 - "Yes, this will be challenging, and yet I'm pretty sure we can find ways to help you manage it."
 - "Aww, I can see you're tired! That often happens when you haven't had enough fluids. Let me get you a cup of juice and see if that helps perk you up."
 - "It's normal to be nervous about something like this. What's one thing you can do to pull your anxiety down to a more manageable level?"
 - "Hmmm. I can see it *seems* intimidating, yet I'm pretty sure it's not *entirely* impossible. What could we do to make it merely very difficult?"
- What you're looking for is the middle ground, the wiggle room, the tiny step of progress. If you succeed – great! If you don't, the information you gather in the process will equip you for the next round



Encouraging Independent Ideas

-Encourage independent thinking: Talk about news and current events during meals, family walks, or driving. Encourage sharing opinions to build confidence and value in expressing thoughts. Teach how to debate and speak opinions respectfully

-Find ways to entertain self: Every moment does not need to be filled with something. Time being bored encourages children to initiate and carry out their own ideas and play independently.

-Find time to engage in your own interests: Model for your kids that it is healthy and important to have your own independent needs and interests.

-Give simple choices often (that you can stick with) and validate feelings around power to choose.



Ideas for Academic Independence

-Keep Track of Homework/Events: Give your child their own calendar for important dates and appointments. Get sticker embellishments and nice pens to get them excited about keeping a schedule. Calendar can include projects, appointments, lessons, playdates, assignments etc. Summer would be a great time to practice keeping a calendar because it is low pressure to maintain.

-Start small: Keep track of two subjects, and assist with tracking the rest and build onto a full schedule. Begin by identifying long term assignments vs. shorter assignments. Challenge kids to be able to create and follow a certain number of days of their own schedule before school is over.

-Use a fun school event to encourage academic planning. If students look forward to Tefillah, have them mark it on the calendar, send invites, plan a meal, and set a reminder alarm for the family to sit down for event.



Ideas for Independence in the Home

-**Household Chores:** Sweeping, washing dishes, laundry, set the table, clean room, make bed, organize a room, pick a bouquet from the garden, pull weeds. Their work makes a valuable contribution to the family.

-**Help with Meal Planning:** Pick menu options, prep food/wash produce, help shop (online or in-person after shelter in place), help cook. Ordinary activities can lead to helpful family conversations

-**Set long term summer goals,** or large projects to take on while school is out



Ideas for Independence with Others

-Help take care of younger siblings or other kids: Read books to siblings, help with homework, offer to help neighbors with young children or who are elderly.

-Volunteer Work: Help children learn to think outside themselves and increase empathy by seeing the needs of others and showing kindness.

-Have a garage sale/product stand. Let children come up with product (if safe), create signs, set up stand outside house and collect money (again, when safe).

-Set goals for large projects with family, let them make a plan, enlist help, and lead project.

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Consider Present Circumstances

-During times of stress, big life adjustments, and lack of sleep, it can be difficult to introduce new responsibilities.

-Expect regression due to increasing responsibilities and present world conditions.

-Try and stay upbeat and go with the flow. There will be mismatched socks and messy cooking, but it's worth seeing how proud they will be of themselves! Allow space for mistakes and problem-solving, and give grace where needed due to circumstances.