

Parent Page April 2016



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Raising Problem Solvers The One Question to Ask Before Helping Your Child By Alissa Marquess creativewithkids.com

If there is one skill I wish I had taken more seriously earlier in parenting, it would be teaching my kids problem solving. I came into parenting with a mindset of wanting make my kids happy (I write a little about that in this piece on realizing it's ok for my kids to be angry sometimes.) I equated a peaceful home with successful motherhood, and this means I have often offered help in the name of keeping the situation calm, instead of allowing my kids to face frustration and experience finding their own solution. While I still highly value peace, I am coming to terms with the fact that in order to learn how to deal with the problems my kids will undoubtedly face, they must get lots and lots and LOTS of practice problem solving. That's why I have been asking myself this one question each time I am tempted to help my kids, or when they ask me for help:

Is this something they can do by themselves? If so – am I going to help them or is this a good chance to allow them (or push them) to do the work themselves? With younger children we often jump in without even being asked, **simply because it takes a long time for kids to do things themselves**. However, whenever possible, if you allow that time, you've given them one more time to practice a daily life skill – the more independent they get the easier things will be for you both.

Sometimes I offer help because I'm uncomfortable seeing my child struggle. Implementing the 17 second rule, where I wait at least 17 seconds before jumping in, has been very important for me in breaking this habit.

My oldest child often gets unsure or overwhelmed. When we're learning something new we need lots of encouragement and time for training, as Sheila from Practical Parenting puts it. The tasks we think should be easy are still new to our kids, or even when they're not new, our kids are growing and learning so much each day that the old sometimes feels new. I am practicing encouraging my son and **asking a question back** when he asks me things that I believe he can do or find out on his own. It might be a guiding question like, "Where would you find that information?" When he's overwhelmed instead of saving him from frustration I am trying "You seem a bit overwhelmed by this task. What is the next little step you can take?"

If the answer is no – this is not something you believe your child can do on their own, my next question would be: Is this something I can support them in doing at least partly by themselves? Your three year old wants to make lunch. If she can't spread the peanut butter, can she work with you and plop the jam on the bread? Could she press the pieces together? All of the little actions we do so easily as adults are built of of thousands and thousands of practice times doing those actions. We have a large "bank" of ready actions for facing a new problem or frustration.

Each time we support our child through doing something on their own we help them build resilience and increase their own competence and capability bank. Often I struggle with how much longer this takes, but I am reminding myself that when I shortcut by doing something for my kids that they could manage on their own, it's not a true shortcut. It only leaves something they will need to practice later. My job is to raise capable independent people. I better give them lots of chances to *practice, mess up, and try again* while the stakes are not so high as they will be once their out on their own.

How are you with this? Do you feel you help more than is helpful?



SEE NOW WHAT I CAN DO

Tune: "Hokey-Pokey"

I can reach up high,
I can reach down low.
I can clap, clap fast,
I can clap...clap...slow.
I can jump up and down,
I can twirl all around.
See now what I can do!

Elizabeth Scofield

Invite your children to act out the song you sing. Then repeat the song, substituting other action words for "reach" and "clap," such as "look" or "dance."

Eggs In A Basket

1. Cut a Hole in a slice of bread using a small cup or cookie cutter.
2. Butter the two pieces of bread and put in the skillet on medium heat.
3. Crack a whole egg into the hole or stir up egg (scrambled) and put in hole. 4.
4. Cook on both sides.
5. Serve "Egg In A Basket" with fresh fruit for a yummy breakfast.



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