

# Parenting *ideas*


## INSIGHTS

### Building parent-school partnerships

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## The secret to raising happy, confident kids

Despite what you may think, the fundamental job of the parent has not changed since the dawn of time. And it's never too early to start.



The first habit from Stephen Covey's wonderful book *The 7 habits of highly effective people* states that we should start every project or undertaking with the end in mind.

This principle holds true for any activity whether it's planting a vegie patch, renovating a house or raising children. When you know what you are trying to achieve then choosing the right strategies becomes easy.

The end game or goal for parents is redundancy. Yep, you read it right. Your job is to make yourself redundant as a parent from your child's earliest possible age. It always has been and always should be.

When redundancy is your aim most of your time, effort and energy will go into promoting independence. You'll stop doing things for kids and start giving them opportunities to do things themselves. You'll spend most of your active parenting time teaching, explaining and prodding your child toward independence.

### INDEPENDENCE LEADS TO THE 4 CS

When independence becomes your priority, suddenly will reveal a pathway to the development of other positive qualities and traits in your children. These include the key four: confidence, competence, creativity and character. Here's how:

**Confidence** comes from facing your fears and doing things for yourself.

**Competence** comes from the opportunity to develop self-mastery that independence offers.

**Creativity** is developed when kids solve problems themselves as opposed to someone solving them on their behalf or, worse, sheltering them from any risk of harm.

It's amazing how resourceful kids can be when they are given the chance to resolve their own problems.

**Character**, which is essential for success, is forged under hardship and is needed if kids are to live a sturdy life. Kids need to be exposed to disappointment, failure and conflict if character strengths such as grit and perseverance are to be forged.

### INDEPENDENCE TAKES MANY FORMS

Independence has many guises and can be developed in many ways, though in the end it is adults who are the gatekeepers for their children's independence.

On a basic level developing independence is about developing children's **autonomy**. Without realising it, many parents make choices on their children's behalf. Kids build self-confidence when they do things for themselves, and make their own decisions.

Independence is built when children spend time in **unpredictable circumstances** and environments such as the bush, and also have the opportunity to navigate their neighbourhoods on their own. There may be some risk involved but that is where the learning lies. Eliminate the risk and you eliminate the learning.

Allowing kids to **follow their own impulses** even if they are different to your own is the key to gaining independence. This may mean that your children choose healthy interests and pursuits that you are unfamiliar with, or even swim against the tide of your wishes.

Allowing kids to take **responsibility** and own their own problems builds confidence and competence. Start by expecting kids to help at home. Look for ways to develop self-help skills and don't take their problems on as your problems.

### MANAGE VISUALLY

When your end game is redundancy and your priority is independence building then managing your kids in a visual way becomes your most obvious strategy. Management by mouth, in contrast, is a dependency strategy. So talk less, use signs, lists and rosters backed up by consequences to develop independence and responsibility in your children.

### CREATE JUNIOR VERSIONS OF INDEPENDENCE

It can be scary and also difficult developing independence in one big step. So smart parents intuitively develop junior versions of independence by breaking up big activities into digestible bits. Want your three-year-old to make the bed? Then start by arranging the teddies and the pillows (a junior version of making the bed) and let them work their way up from there. Similarly, if you want your five-year-old to walk to school on his own but it's currently beyond him, then accompany him most of the way and let him walk the last 200 metres on his own. That's a junior version of walking to school.

In all the noise and commotion about raising kids today it's easy to forget that the job description for parents hasn't changed since the dawn of time. Love them, bond with them, teach them and spend time with them. But also work like mad to develop their real independence so they become capable of handling what life will throw their way.

Then you'll know your job as a parent is done! It doesn't mean you won't stop worrying about them ... that's a story for another time. But it does mean you've finished the main task of parenting, that is, to make yourself redundant at the earliest possible age.

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