

Freedom to Grow



Have you ever seen a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis? It's tempting to help it break free, but the struggle to get out strengthens the butterfly's wings. Parents want to help their children and keep them safe, but too much help can result in a child unable to spread his wings and fly.

Consider the child's age and stage of development.

Toddlers need close supervision, but most preschoolers can direct their own actions for short periods of time as long as they are in a safe environment. You don't expect toddlers to dress themselves, but many 4-year-olds can do so with little help. Try observing others of your child's age or read reliable resources on what can be expected of a child their age.

Keep in mind the difference between danger and minor risk.

Consider what your child wants to do. There's an obvious difference between letting her play in a swimming pool, where she could drown, and letting her play in a mud puddle where she would get wet and dirty. Young children need close supervision when there is danger, but they also need to be allowed to get messy and play actively.

Give him opportunities to learn to interact with other people.

You may need to coach your 2-year-old to respond to a question from an adult or find a toy for a friend to play with. Try letting your 4-year-old speak for himself and find ways to play with a friend on his own. A parent or teacher can step in when help might be needed.

Let her learn to play with a new toy or do an art project on her own.

A child may not play with a toy or a game the way the maker of it intended. As long as it's causing no damage, let her try it her way. She may paint trees pink and the sun blue, but let the artwork be her own.

Consider allowing your child to fail and try again.

Just as your baby probably fell over many times in learning to walk, he may need several tries to dress himself, put a puzzle together, or help you set the table. He may have to search for the toy or book he forgot to put away. Be sensitive to when he needs time to do it himself and times he does need help.

Stay calm over minor mishaps, physical or emotional.

Let your child know that you care, but that small hurts are a part of life. Take care of the scrape or kiss the bump and encourage her to go back to playing. Help her find ways to cope when her friend wants to play with another child or teases her, but try not to overreact.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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