10 September 2019

Why self-sufficiency is paramount

- **CONFIDENCE**

by Michael Grose

Recently, a mother of two primary school children thanked me for the impact one of my presentations had on her parenting style.

When I asked what was it that made the difference, she said that one particular question I posed in the presentation had the most impact. The question was *"What are you regularly doing for your children now that they can do themselves?"*

This mother attended my *Parenting for Independence* seminar after reading my book <u>Spoonfed Generation</u>. My message of developing self-sufficiency in children from the earliest possible age stayed with her.

She said that the independence message really came home to roost when her children went to an international school in Germany two years later. Self-sufficiency was expected at the school so the training she provided them as a result of the seminar such as in teaching them to pack school bags, preparing snacks and assisting with meals, doing daily chores, and getting themselves up each morning helped to prepare them for the expectations of an international school.

Why is self-sufficiency important?

Self-sufficiency, of the 'I can do it myself' kind, is the basis of self-esteem and resilience. One of the main developmental tasks is for children and

teenagers to gain a sense of control and mastery over their environment. This mastery begins by gaining basic competencies such as being able to feed and dress yourself as a toddler and then gradually adding new competencies as physical and mental capacities allow. The development of children's independence can be frustrating and time-consuming, particularly if you are time-poor or have a strong perfectionist streak. But that is the price of independence-building.

Step back to allow kids to step up

Respected US parenting and child development expert Dr. Debora Gilboa (aka Dr. G) believes parents need to step back to allow children to step up. It's a smart phrase that infers that parents need to take on the role of their child's teacher rather than be the person who is always solving their problems and doing routine tasks for them.

Gilboa says, "It's crucial that you take a step back and let your kids make mistakes and learn from their experiences. You aren't going to be there in adulthood to clear the obstacles they face or solve their struggles." It is through dealing with their own frustrations and learning from their mistakes that kids develop the resilience needed to stand on their own two feet.

Self-sufficiency tips

Gilboa gives the following three tips to develop self-sufficiency in children at any age:

1. Problem-solving. When your child or adolescent comes to you with a problem, resist the urge to fix it. Invite them to resolve the problem themselves.

2. Welcome failure. This is hard in our perfectionistic world but expect them to struggle and talk about what they can do to get back on their feet.

3. Expect them to help. Give them tasks that help the whole family, not just themselves and make sure they do them well. Be patient, but firm.

Self-sufficiency has many forms and many faces, including the ability to problem-solve, emotional self-regulation and taking responsibility for your actions. It's easiest to develop in children when they are young. This is also because not every child in a family will take to independence as willingly as others.

If developing independence is something that you haven't focused on before, don't despair. It's not too late to start. Begin where you feel comfortable, rather than make huge changes straightaway. Persist rather

than give in when you have resisters; the notion of independence is too important for children's future success.

Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation* and the best-selling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. His latest release Anxious Kids, was co-authored with Dr Jodi Richardson.