

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - Australia's leading parenting educator



Do less, not more, for your kids

With school-aged children we can find ourselves making lunches, getting kids out of bed and cleaning out schoolbags rather than giving these basic tasks of living over to them.

The basic task of parenting, whether you have a two year old or a twenty-two year old, is to work yourself out of a job at the first possible chance.

REDUNDANCY should be the aim of the game! We never become redundant in a relationship sense – the emotional connection between our children and us is never severed.

In a practical, physical way we need to make children less, rather than more, reliant on us.

Developing independence is really about stepping back to allow children in. Doing less rather than more!

We develop greater independence in our kids one job at a time.

Recently I gave my 22 year old son a job that I had been doing for a while. He lives in North America and I had taken on the job of being the connector between him and one of his sisters, who lives in the UK. It had been my job to pass messages on between the two via telephone and emails. I would update each of them about how the other sibling was going.

Frustrated being the go-between I made sure he had contact details and let him know that it was his job, not my job, to connect with his sister.

We easily take on children's responsibilities

It is easy as parents to take on the jobs and responsibilities that really should belong to our children. With toddlers it is so easy to dress, feed and clean up after them rather than give these jobs over to them.

With school-aged children we can find ourselves making lunches, getting kids out of bed and cleaning out schoolbags rather than giving these basic tasks of living over to them.

And as I discovered, it is easy to still do the basics of life for adult-aged children.

TIP NO. 1 for developing independence:

Be clear about who owns jobs or tasks in your family and never take on a child's job, or part of a task, unless there is extenuating circumstances such as illness.

A mother I met recently is very clear on who does what in her home. It is her job to wash the clothes of her early teenage children but it

is their job to place them in the washing basket. She doesn't check bedrooms as it is not her job to place kids' clothes in the washing basket.

Okay, I can hear your thought processes. Sounds good but what happens if kids don't give a toss and they don't mind being dirty.

Good point. In this case, this mum has a son who is, to say the least, fairly slack in the area of hygiene. But she didn't become overly fussed about that.

She certainly didn't get fussed when he played a game of football in the wet, muddy jumper that lay in his sports bag for a week. And she happily showed him how to work the washing machine when he wanted his favourite shirt (that he forgot to put in the washing basket) to be washed for a special night out.

TIP NO. 2 for developing independence:

Never be more worried about a child's job than they are, otherwise it becomes your job, not theirs.

This mum remained very clear that it was her job to wash the clothes but not to place them in the washing basket. She would remind kids about washing night, but never nag them to put clothes in the basket. She knows that as soon as she keeps reminding them, it becomes HER job rather than her children's job to put the washing in the clothes basket.

The school holidays provides a good opportunity to reflect on the whole notion of job-sharing. It's also a good time for kids to increase their job load when they are not burdened with schoolwork and extra-curricular activities.

Here's my challenge for you: Think of a job that you regularly do for your child that he or she can do for him or herself. Then step back and enable your child to do that for themselves on a full-time basis. Do less not more for your kids.

If you do that, then you can congratulate yourself as you have moved one step more toward REDUNDANCY.

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