

Moving Adolescents Toward Independence

Adolescence is a time for our children to begin to explore their own individuality. It's natural for them to seek independence and their own identity, but it doesn't have to mean a disconnection from their parents or their family. Giving adolescents age-appropriate freedom builds independence and confidence and can actually encourage a *healthier* connection between them and their parents as they grow into confident, productive young adults. Adolescents who are over-protected can have diminished social confidence and experience difficulty separating from their parents at the appropriate age. It's important for us to use this transition time to teach the skills that will guide our children as they become independent and successful individuals.

Throughout this skill building phase, encourage independence that is comfortable and appropriate for your child. Remember—you know your child better than anyone else. If you have more than one child, this process may look different for each of them. As opportunities arise, make decisions together with the understanding that independence comes with responsibility.

Sometimes letting go of childhood is more difficult for parents than it is for the adolescent. As your child tries out their newly developing independence, it's important for parents to remember to not take it personally. They still love you and need you, but they are becoming the person you raised them to be— independent, productive young adults who are ready to contribute their amazing talents to the world. Use this month's Power Tips as a guide to help you reinforce those skills of independence.

March Prevention Principle

"All resilience-based community change approaches have, as a bottom line, getting youth involved as partners in the change effort. Youth need to have ownership and active roles in the life of their community if the community is to serve as a protective factor."

Bonnie Benard

[Resilience: What We Have Learned](#)

Power Tips

Responsibility— Adolescents can begin to manage school and home obligations on their own. Homework, chores, and other commitments should be completed without parental "nudging". When those expectations are met, then they can begin to discuss increased levels of freedom.

Accountability— As they develop more independence, adolescents need to be able to recognize and accept that choices have consequences. As parents, we need to allow them to face those consequences without interference and help them to acknowledge the connection between the choices they make and the consequences (positive or negative) that follow.

Work— It's important to invest time and effort into something we want. Working toward a goal will help to make that goal more valuable to the individual and enhance independence.

Self-help— We can (with good intentions) be too quick to rush to our children's aid. Sometimes, we need to step back and give them time to accomplish tasks on their own—even if it means they might make some mistakes along the way. Adolescents need to begin to learn to solve problems, communicate with teachers about school related problems and manage their time (including getting themselves up for school). It's not easy to step back and let our children struggle through a situation that might be so easy for us to handle *for* them. However, allowing them the space and time to do it on their own, will show them that you believe in their ability and the experience will give them a sense of accomplishment that will move them toward a more independent future.

Conversations that Count

Each of us is an important part of our community. We each have talents and strengths that make us unique. We use those talents and strengths to make a difference in our family, our school and our community. An important part of building resilience is recognizing our individual strengths and determining how we can use them to make a difference in the world. Use this month's [PowerTalk for Families: Family Talent Night](#) to discover and practice the talents of each member of your family!

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