

Life isn't random...preparing adolescents to take control

TAKING CONTROL

Things OUTSIDE my control



An important part of moving our adolescents toward independence is helping them to begin to take control of their lives. Sometimes, in an effort to protect our children and show them how much we love them, parents can move in and “take over” our children’s lives. As well intentioned as those actions may be, that can interfere with our children’s ability to take control of their own lives and their future decisions. This lack of control can lead to a victim mentality causing adolescents to believe that things happen to them instead of because of decisions they make. When individuals recognize they have internal control, they begin to see that the choices they make determine what happens in their lives, not the other way around.

Adolescents need to learn how to control their own circumstances. When adolescents realize that they can take control of the decisions they make, they are more likely to do what it takes to persevere through difficult circumstances and bounce back stronger. They are more likely to try new things and build a stronger sense of control.

Recent studies show that many college students don’t know how to manage their own time. In high school, parents reminded them to turn in assignments and study for upcoming tests. They never had to worry about how to fill free time, because someone else always filled their calendars with designated activities. When faced with having to be responsible for their own study habits in college, many had no idea where to start. When our children don’t learn how to find productive ways to fill their free time at an early age, they are more vulnerable to unhealthy activities or negative peer influence.

We recently spoke with middle school social workers and counselors and asked, “In what ways can parents help adolescents take more control of their lives?” This is what they told us:

- ⇒ **Responsibility**– As they mature, provide age-appropriate opportunities for adolescents to practice responsible decision making—making their own lunch, being responsible to complete school assignments without parental reminders, watching out for younger siblings, extending the boundaries of where they are able to travel independently. Expand those responsibilities when they demonstrate their ability to manage increased control.
- ⇒ **Making Choices**- They are in control of the choices they make. Use that control to make choices that will move them closer to their goals.
- ⇒ **Individual gifts and talents**– Help them to discover ways they can use their unique, individual gifts and talents to make a difference in their family, school or community.
- ⇒ **Realistically assess problems**– Sometimes, adolescents overestimate the size of a problem. We can help them look at their problems realistically and help them find ways to solve those problems.

It can be difficult to “let go” and realize that our children are becoming more independent. Independence is a natural part of growing up and by teaching them to take control of their lives in a responsible way, we can equip our children to experience success and happiness as they go.

Prevention Principle

A sense of control promotes healthy decision making.

Conversations that Count

Adolescence is a time for exploring individuality. Parents have the responsibility of providing safety and boundaries for their children as they move toward independence.

Use this month’s PowerTalk activity to help your child [Move Toward Independence](#) by involving them in the process.

Tech Tips for Parents: Parent Supervision Online

In their quest for independence, adolescents begin to spend more time away from their parents’ supervision. It’s important to remember that it is our responsibility as parents to keep them safe...no matter where they go. That includes the virtual places they “go” when they are online. Even the most tech savvy parents can be blindsided by their children’s ability to access websites and apps that their parents know nothing about.

Take a few minutes to review these important tips:

- * Install [monitoring software and use parental controls](#) on any computers or electronic devices that your children are using. This is not an invasion of their privacy...it’s keeping them safe.
- * [Regularly check all devices and “try” each of the apps.](#) If you don’t know what an app is for or how it works, have your child demonstrate it for you.
- * Delete any apps that have potential for putting your child in a dangerous situation.
- * [Keep current on app trends.](#) App developers are smart. It seems that as soon as parents learn about and delete apps that could be troublesome, a new danger crops up.
- * Use parental controls available through your [cell phone provider service.](#)



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