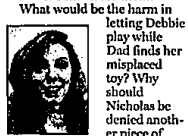


Over-functioning blocks road to independence

I feel good to do nice things for our kids. Sometimes, we are so eager to please, that we do too much for them.



Parenting Corner

Marilyn Suttle

why should she have to? What happens when parents over-function?

Over-functioning parents start out with good intentions. They're trying to be loving and kind. They believe that making life easier for their kids will bring happiness. In truth, when we do for children what they could do for themselves, we rob them of valuable opportunities. We steal away their experiences. We snatch away their personal growth.

When Dad says, "Don't worry Jill, I'll find your toy for you," Jill stays dependent on him to make things happen in her life. If Dad expects Debbie to help find the missing toy, she is empowered. She gains the experience of learning how to retrace her steps. The discomfort of looking for the toy is replaced by the satisfaction that she can help find things when they are missing.

Indulged kids, grow up expecting others to enter to them, just as their parents did.

Feeling helpless to help things, they become frustrated by the reality of the outside world. By shielding kids from frustrations, life becomes harder for them.

Learning to cope with the frustration of pulling on socks all by themselves, for example, is a valuable learning process. They begin to see that they can struggle, fail, and try again until those socks are on their feet. The process of coping with the struggle will help kids find the courage to attempt more challenging tasks. Interfering with children's growing capabilities almost seems cruel. It leaves them less equipped to cope with life outside our homes.

Once we start over-functioning, it's hard to stop. Parents have to fight their own emotional need to be needed. It is deeply satisfying to feel needed. When our children were newborns, we had to do everything for them. They couldn't even hold up their heads without our help. We defined ourselves as good parents by tending to all their needs.

Danielle has two boys. Her oldest son, Sam, wanted her to stay with him at preschool. He would cling to her legs when she tried to leave, begging her not to go. For weeks, she had a terrible time getting Sam to feel comfortable at school.

On the first day, just as she was preparing to comfort him, Nathan said, "Bye mom," and ran into the room to play. Instead of feeling good about

his easy transition into preschool, Danielle felt pangs of disappointment, as she thought, "He doesn't need me."

When our kids try to put their clothes on by themselves, pour their own juice, buckle their own seatbelts, it is a sign of their growing independence. We are still needed, but we are needed differently. Our role as parents includes helping children learn how to help themselves.

Our desire for perfection also blocks children from becoming independent. Parents can do most things better than kids can. After all, we have more experience. We can wipe a table cleaner, make the bed neater, and tie shoes quicker. We can do things so much better, quicker, and more efficiently that we tend to take over, even when we don't have to. It's hard to watch kids struggle, and for some of us, it's nearly impossible to let them do a task less than perfect.

I remember when my seven-year-old offered to fold the towels on Mothers Day. I demonstrated how to fold them and let him do it. I could have folded the whole load in the time it took him to fold one towel. It was hard for me to watch as he stumbled through the process. The towels were not folded perfectly, but they were folded. He was proud of himself too.

With effort and praise, our kids will learn to do things more accurately. The table might not be perfectly clean while they learn to wipe it, the bed might be lumpy for a while. That's ok. They will learn to improve their bed making skills, only if we give them the opportunity to make their beds.

A mom in a recent parenting workshop was stunned by this discussion. She said, "I always resist my kids attempts to help in the kitchen. It bothered me when they wanted to make macaroni and cheese or learn how to iron because that's my job as the parent. When the kids show an interest, I push them away, off my turf. I think I actually felt threatened by their interest. Now I'm beginning to

see that my job is to let my kids learn how to do those things." From tots to teens, children who are allowed to do age appropriate activities by themselves, grow in confidence and ability. Does this mean we should never do anything to pamper our kids? Certainly not. It's comforting to have someone bring you a box of tissues when your nose is stuffy. It feels good to get an unexpected treat once

in a while. If the majority of the time you respect your children's ability to do things for themselves, you will help them live up to their full potential.

Marilyn Suttle, a professional member of the National Speakers Association, brings personal and professional growth seminars to corporate and educational settings. Email her at MsSuttle@aol.com.

Oakland County Child Care Council receives Skillman Grant

Local child care efforts received a boost support recently when the Skillman Foundation awarded a three-year \$345,892 grant to the Oakland County Child Care Council to expand its successful Joining Forces Initiative.

Joining Forces II will allow the Council to replicate in south Oakland what it and several agency partners have done in the seven north Oakland communities of Clarkston, Brandon, Lake Orion, Oxford, Waterford, Pontiac and Auburn Hills. The program in north Oakland is part of United Way of Oakland's Success by Six effort.

Under the new grant, the Oakland County Child Care Council plans to work with the communities of Hazel Park, Oak Park, Royal Oak Township, Ferndale and parts of Southfield in collaboration with other human services agencies and school districts.

The first Joining Forces Initiative has successfully created models with great potential to help other Oakland County communities seeking child care solutions," said Susan Ray Allen, executive director of the Council.

"Our collaboration sites serve as bridges between parents and providers and state agencies, and has helped us leverage additional local support such as United Way of Oakland County," Allen added.

The Joining Forces Initiative aims to increase the accessibility and affordability of quality care for low- and moderate-income families.

The goals of the project are to increase professional training and networking opportunities for child care providers,

and conduct parent education workshops on choosing quality care and recognizing the benefits of early childhood education.

As one of its goals, Joining Forces II will continue its work to increase the skills of child care providers by offering low-cost professional development courses through the Michigan Child Care Futures Project.

Another of the Council's targeted groups for outreach is the relatives and aides of family members who provide in-home care subsidized by the Family Independence Agency.

The Skillman Foundation is a resource for improving the

lives of children in metropolitan Detroit. The Foundation applies its resources to foster positive relationships between children and adults, support high quality learning opportunities and strengthen healthy, safe and supportive homes and communities.

The Oakland County Child Care Council has advocated and promoted quality child care since 1973. It is one of 15 regional offices located throughout the state, part of the Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care Association.

For more information, call toll free at 1-866-4CHILD-CARE.

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Benefit concert featuring noted
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Live performance by
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Ticket Information - Plaza

Seating: \$15; Lawn
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New Chellstorp works displayed

During the month of August, Marjorie Chellstorp will be exhibiting a series of paintings called "Dreamscape" at the Farmington downtown library. Chellstorp is a well-known artist in the community and has her work entered in local and national exhibitions. She is Farmington/Farmington Hills Artist in Residence for the year 2000.

Stop by the library, which is located on Liberty Street near City Hall, and see her new series.