

The Quest for Independence and Identity

“A lot of parents will do anything for their children, except let them be themselves.” — BANKSY

This quote hits home for many of us. We all want the best for our kids, but sometimes our efforts to guide them can stifle their individuality. While setting boundaries is essential (think veggies, homework, and bedtime), too much control can backfire.

Revel in Rebellion

Setting limits on our children’s behaviour is a natural part of parenting, but it’s important to strike a balance between limits and control. Our kids are wired to test boundaries, and that’s actually a good thing! Their defiance is often a sign of a healthy desire for autonomy and independence.

Yes, our children’s defiance can be inconvenient or even frustrating, but research suggests that those so-called “strong-willed” children often develop stronger self-reliance and well-being later in life. So, if you find yourself parenting a little rebel, take heart – their spirited nature is likely a positive sign of their growth and development.

Be their Safety Net, not their Sherpa

Think of your child’s journey as a mountain they need to climb. It’s tempting to try to pave the path for them, but they need to scramble, stumble, and figure things out on their own. Your job is to be their safety net, not their Sherpa.

Our role isn’t to control, but to guide. By offering a safe space to push against, we empower our children to flourish and become their most authentic selves.

The Identity Quest

The quest to find out who we really are begins early and lasts a lifetime. Letting children be themselves means fostering self-understanding, discovering passions, promoting independent thinking, and allowing autonomy to shape their identity and decisions. Children need the freedom to make choices – even mistakes – to discover who they truly are.

What Lights You Up?

Have you noticed that your child is energised by some things but completely uninterested in others? Each of our children has unique talents, strengths, and gifts. Helping them discover those things that spark delight and enthusiasm, and developing those things over time, will help them discover themselves.

Don't Follow the Crowd

Encouraging our children to think independently and stand up for what they believe in, even when it means standing alone, is crucial in helping them discover who they really are. You can help your children do this in a number of ways:

1. Don't tell them what to think. Instead, ask them what they think.

It might be easy in the heat of a disagreement to tell your teen that they don't know what they're talking about when they offer an opinion contrary to yours. You'll actually get further by digging a little deeper, rather than trying to prove them wrong: "Wow, you have strong opinions about [topic]. Tell me why you feel so strongly."

2. Invite them to take the perspective of others.

When someone with a different religion, culture, or way of life does something that they react negatively to, invite them to consider *why* that person may have acted that way.

3. Encourage them to think critically but act compassionately.

Unfortunately the people who get the most global attention are not always the best role models. Rather than shielding your child from difficult news stories, use them as a springboard for meaningful conversations (while keeping their age in mind). Instead of focusing on simple judgments of "right" or "wrong," dig deeper with questions like:

- "What have you heard about this situation? What are your initial thoughts?"
- "Why do you think people have different opinions on this matter?"
- "How might the actions of those involved affect others? How might they feel?"
- "If you were in their shoes, what would you do differently?"

By asking open-ended questions, you encourage your child to think critically, analyse different perspectives, and develop empathy for those involved. It's a chance to help them form their own opinions based on thoughtful consideration, rather than simply repeating what they hear from others.

Letting go and allowing our children to make their own choices, even with the risk of missteps, can be one of the hardest yet most rewarding parts of parenting. By offering support, guidance, and unwavering belief in their potential, you empower your child to forge their own path and become a confident, independent individual.



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