



INDEPENDENCE IN A MOTHER BIRD'S PERSPECTIVE

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There comes a point in a little birdie's life when it starts to flap its wings in preparation for leaving its nest. A mother bird looks on, probably feeling pride that its little birdie has learned to use what it has to show independence, while at the same time feeling anxious that this could be the beginning of the little one's struggle to cut off the ties that bind it to its mother. Being a parent, I have felt the same thing many times over.

When my children started preschool, there was this apprehension in me, which is common among parents. Every school year marks another milestone of independence thereafter. Our children's ability to reach developmental growth milestones means they are more able to strike out a little at a time on their own. Remember when your child learned to tie his shoelaces by himself? Or when your princess learned to fix her hair with an elastic band? Those days when you did those things for your child are long gone. Pretty soon, your son will be using intricate maneuvers to tie his own shoes, or your princess will be learning really cool techniques to tidy up her hair. Time flies, and our children learn to fly away from the nest.

While we need to loosen the apron strings for our children to truly optimize their various stages of growth, it doesn't mean we need to let all hell break loose and pay them no attention any longer. In fact, during the stages of significant development towards independence that our children go through, we need to be there all the more, though in a less manipulative way. Our children will always be testaments to our quality of parenthood, but that should not be a hindrance for them to carve out their own niche and establish their own identity beyond our shadow. To be overprotective is not love, but neither is leaving our children to their own devices. We need to show them at every level that they will always have us with them, but we need to show them responsibility and self-accountability. It's a difficult balancing act, and even parents who've been at it for so long always find that one child is totally different from another. There are no hard-and-fast rules to teaching children about independence, but we can still utilize our parental instincts to find out what can work best for each of our children.

To let your child fly free takes courage and a whole lot of hope and faith. But as long as our children are given the right amount of understanding and guidance, there is no reason why they wouldn't grow up to be sources of pride for us.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why is it difficult to teach independence to a child?
2. How would you teach independence to your own child?
3. What are the possible hindrances to a child's ability to achieve independence?
4. Would you say you were brought up to be independent by your parents? How was this accomplished?
5. Why is it not wise to use the same approach all the time in teaching children about independence?