

# ParentBrief



## Raising independent kids

As parents, we're keen to encourage our babies and toddlers to discover their world. We supervise and watch over them...in the safety of home or a day care setting. But our toddlers soon grow into kids wanting independence and chances to free range with other kids. All of a sudden we're faced with making judgement calls on whether our kids are old enough or mature enough to do things outside our watch. How do we know they're ready? How do we know we're ready to let them spread their wings?...

Our kids' independence starts with us

Our kids start life with us doing everything for them, but it's healthier for everyone if things don't stay this way. Our kids will always depend on us for love, encouragement, protection, guidance and support. But given that our kids will most probably only be under our care for a relatively short time in their lives, it's up to us to teach them how to do life for themselves.

Kids thrive in secure relationships and the freedom to make choices within limits. Independence develops in age-appropriate steps and giving kids opportunities to assess a situation and take responsibility for their actions gives them the confidence to want to be independent. Confident, independent kids stand a much better chance of learning how to take control of their lives. Kids develop independence from success, failure, disappointment, teamwork, perseverance and resilience, and independent kids are more likely to be successful and achieve in school and life generally.

### No one independence call fits all

Every kid is unique, especially when it comes to temperament and skills set. Some kids like to play at

home, others will prefer to spend their lives glued to a screen, and then there are the tearaways who can't wait to fly, baby fly!!

Independence is age-appropriate, but it's also maturity-appropriate. Just because a child has the gross motor skills to handle a pair of scissors, doesn't mean he has the temperament to be responsible with them. Just because a tween is old enough to join her friends at the shopping centre, doesn't mean she's mature enough to resist the peer pressure to hang around the bus stop with the boys.

As parents, it's up to us to know our kids. It's up to us to make the judgement call on independence. To do this, we have to consider our child's age, maturity, temperament, confidence, skills, trust, self-reliance and good old-fashioned nous. To be left unattended and unsupervised, regardless of whether it's within or outside the home, kids also need to be aware of safety and what constitutes potential harm. If we're going to (legally) leave our kids alone and unattended, we need to be sure they have the maturity to know what to do in an emergency and how to get help.

### Creating opportunities to be independent

**Play:** encourage creative play, use of imagination, co-operative and collaborative play with other kids and appropriate, supervised risk taking on safety standard equipment.

**Cleaning up:** allow kids to clean up their mess, pick up their toys, put things away.

**Chores:** draw up a roster with clear guidelines, keep chores age-appropriate but start as early as a child can understand that a certain household job is their responsibility.

**Choices:** let them choose clothes, dress themselves, make a sandwich with fillings of their own choice.

**Responsibility:** for their own alarm, school bag, sports equipment, teddy on board, making their own breakfast, getting the spoon from dish to mouth, getting somewhere on time, use of technology.

**Self care:** provide stools and steps to reach taps to wash hands, hooks and rails low enough for towels, teach teeth cleaning, hair shampooing and rinsing, ensure they have access to shelves, cupboards and laundry basket.

**Role modeling:** thinking through consequences, risk assessment, traffic and stranger danger, ways to resist peer pressure, encourage questions, discuss age-appropriate freedom.