

INSIGHTS

Developing skills for independent living



As a parent, the ultimate goal for adolescents is to achieve autonomy. This quest for independence shows in many ways, including frequent challenges to the family status quo, small acts of defiance and straight-out refusal to cooperate with parental ideas and suggestions. All exhausting for parents on the receiving end.

This boundary testing signals a readiness to begin developing your young person's independence and self-sufficiency skills. Not only is this good preparation for their life without you, but it gives them a chance to show that they are growing up.

Complicating the development of independent living skills is the fact that many young people believe that they are far older and more capable than they are, yet many parents believe their children are younger and less capable than they really are. Getting the balance right is the key. Let's get started.

Expectations

As your young person gets busier with school and activities outside home it's tempting to put less expectations on them to help at home. This may make life easier for them in the short term, but in the long term, your young person will benefit more from learning how to take care of themselves and by contributing regularly to their family's wellbeing. These activities include:

- Cooking a meal
- Shopping for supermarket items
- Washing their own clothes
- Regular chores such as emptying the garbage, mowing the lawn or cleaning up the garden
- Looking after younger siblings

Balance

School, peers, family, personal interests and part-time work can compete for your young person's attention, which can become overwhelming. Help your young person balance these competing priorities by encouraging them to:

Look ahead

Plan the week out at the start of the week so your young person knows what's coming up.

Keep a schedule

Teach them to use a schedule/planner to stay organised. This is a great way to help them to think ahead, keep track of time and commitments, and also reflect on what they have achieved. Whether it is a physical planner or an electronic one, encouraging young people to use them helps them to build confidence and independence in managing their time.

Allocate carefully

Help your young person allocate their time across all areas such as school, family, peers, interests and work rather than fill up one or two areas.

Plan for downtime

Ensure your young person has some downtime each day to help them relax and unwind.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving is a big part of adult life, so it's best start when young people are under your roof rather than wait until they've flown the nest. Help your young person solve some of their current issues and dilemmas, which range from getting home by themselves after sports practice to being harassed by a peer at school. Here's how:

- Share your own stories and struggles
- Talk through options with them
- Encourage them to tackle problems when they are small
- Discuss when to enlist the assistance of a teacher or other adults

Getting around

Getting around on their own without being reliant on parents is a significant hallmark for independence for young people. Using public transport, negotiating timetables, budgeting and working out what happens when schedules change are important skills to learn. If your young person is reluctant then you can take some trips together by bus or train to help familiarise them.

Responsibility

Encourage your young person to take more initiative with their learning and study habits as they move toward the end of their secondary school years. Take on the role of a coach where you assist them to make sensible decisions about their education including choice of subjects, their homework and schoolwork habits.

As your young person moves through secondary school gradually step back and provide them with more opportunities to become self-sufficient at home, to take on more responsibility outside home, and to have greater influence over their own studies and work habits.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.