

Move over Mum and Dad... I know what I'm doing!

Adjusting your parenting style as your kids transition from young children to teenagers and beyond.

By the time your child reaches high school, you can rest assured they've heard your opinion and advice on just about everything. In fact, beyond the age of about 10, a lot of what we say is just repetition and in their minds, nagging. Telling your kids that they're hot/cold/hungry/tired beyond early childhood is robbing them of their ability to think and make decisions for themselves. They also need to learn to communicate their needs in a way that is listened to and acted upon, rather than us taking care of everything for them. Most importantly we want to empower our kids to trust themselves and sometimes that involves stepping back and letting them learn things the hard way. Of course safety should never be comprised and there will be certain family rules and expectations that are non-negotiable. However, if you find yourself constantly battling with your child because they want to wear shorts in the middle of winter, sleep in their bed the wrong way round or eat leftover spaghetti bolognese for breakfast, lunch and dinner, perhaps it's time to step back, remembering that young people learn best through trial and error.

When our kids are very young we spend an enormous amount of time in control, we are the one in the driver's seat. For the most part, in those early years we make all the decisions around food, clothing, safety, sleeping and so on. Very quickly, our parenting habits are formed and without even thinking about it we spend the next decade or so repeating ourselves. "Put your seatbelt on, you need to go to bed now, you must be cold" and the list goes on. As our children enter adolescence it's usually more productive to take the passenger seat and adopt a curious approach. "where are you headed? how do you feel about that? what do you see happening as a result of that decision? "is there anything else you need to think of?" Respect is vital to this age group. They want to discover who they are all by themselves. As parents we need to give them space to do this.

By late high school and into early adulthood, our parenting style needs to evolve again into more of an airbag or safety net approach. This adaptation takes time and practice but will actually draw your children emotionally closer to you as they know you are there for them unconditionally, if and when needed. Otherwise, show them you trust them to make their own choices and decisions by backing off with the full understanding that there may be dents and scratches along the way. If we continue to monitor and take on the responsibilities of our kids into their teenage and early adult years, we may create a sense of helplessness, creating either over-dependence or avoidance. Remember, you can care deeply for your children without having to make everything right for them.

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