

Frameworks SEL MONTHLY™ COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)
& CULTIVATING INDEPENDENCE

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WHAT IS CULTIVATING INDEPENDENCE?

by Siomara Bridges-Mata, Senior Community Programs Specialist

One goal we share as a community of involved, caring, and nurturing parents, educators, administrators, and youth services professionals is that we genuinely want to see all of our students succeed. Often we jump to “fix-it mode” and try to save and solve our students' challenges for them. Being an involved, caring, and nurturing adult figure in a student's life is a critical component for their success, and research continues to show how it can positively influence a child's life both short and long term. It is also imperative to cultivate their independence for their overall social and emotional development and success. When young people are given opportunities to practice and build a skill, it empowers them to live a safe, happy and healthy life. In this month's SEL community newsletter, we will share tools, strategies, and resources that will support you on your journey of cultivating independence in your kids, and equip them with essential skills to succeed personally, academically, and one day professionally.

EARLY LEARNING

Early childhood is the perfect time to start cultivating independence in children. Everything is a new and exciting learning experience at this age so there are countless opportunities to begin to build independence. It is also a critical time developmentally as the skills and mindsets taught now will lay the foundation for future autonomy. It is important to start with basic steps with young children by allowing them to do tasks for themselves with the close supervision of an adult. You can start by allowing your child to feed themselves, communicate their needs and wants, and navigate their physical environment. Once you feel the child has mastered one area, you can slowly begin to add new tasks for the child to do independently.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

School age brings on a whole new realm of independence. Children of this age are expected to take on more active and autonomous roles in their educational, personal, and social lives. In school, children are required to have more self-discipline, follow instructions, and complete assignments. The same is true at home where children may have more responsibility with household chores and personal grooming. They are also learning to socialize and make friendships. To support children in succeeding in these areas, we can focus on their self-awareness and responsible decision-making skills by encouraging them to think about their preferences and make choices based on these. Two easy ways to start doing this is by allowing them to express their interests through the clothes they choose to wear and activities they chose to participate in.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Similar to the transition to elementary, transitioning to middle school opens up more expectations and opportunities around independence. Middle school students move between classes, are provided more complex assignments, and are assigned more homework. This can be overwhelming if children have not had many opportunities to practice independence skills. Setting a solid foundation early on is critically important. To help middle schoolers in navigating this new age, adults can build on responsible decision-making skills by guiding children to make their own choices through asking questions rather than making decisions for them. Self-management is also key for cultivating independence at this age and can be fostered through completion of daily routines with minimal reminders and time management of responsibilities and leisure activities.

HIGH SCHOOL

Cultivating independence in high schoolers builds off the skills mastered in middle school years. As teenagers prepare for the adult world, more independence is not only expected but required. Young adults are expected to make more complex decisions often without the safety net of adult supervision. To help them prepare for this, we must offer lower risk opportunities to practice this skill and even experience small consequences. An example of this may be allowing a teenager to procrastinate a school assignment and experience the consequences of an all-nighter or poor homework grade. This is also a time to continue guiding their decision-making process by asking questions to encourage their critical thinking and independence rather than giving suggestions.

COPING SKILLS & ACTIVITIES



ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE

by *Eddie Underwood*
SEL Program Specialist

Encouraging independence is important for our children's overall social and emotional development. The best way to practice this is to create opportunities for them to be successful independently - this helps to promote self-awareness and self-confidence. When children attempt something for the first time on their own, they feel proud and excited and often want more opportunities to do things on their own. Here are some options for allowing them to practice being independent:

- Allowing your child to pick out their clothes and dress themselves: at first this might look like giving them a choice between two different color shirts, but allowing your child to choose their ensemble can help to strengthen their decision-making skills.
- Participating in chores or helping to cook a meal helps to give your child a sense of belonging in your family. It also allows your child to contribute in a meaningful way by showing love and care for the rest of the family.
- Allow your child to help in the decision-making process by giving them choices in different aspects of their day. For example: "Would you like a turkey sandwich or peanut butter and jelly sandwich?" or "Where would you like to start cleaning your room: picking up clothes, or putting away your toys?" When choices have options there is a greater chance of success.

Cultivating independence creates an understanding of what it takes to be patient and flexible when facing challenges on their own. It helps children build skills like self-discipline and self-care, which are important skills that our kids will need to be happy, healthy, and safe in the long run.

WHEN CAN WE START CULTIVATING INDEPENDENCE IN OUR CHILDREN?

by *Emily Sewart*
Community Programs Specialist

Cultivating independence in children can start as early in life as the toddler years. Have you ever had to redirect a toddler away from a situation that may not be the safest; or tried to assist them in getting dressed, or putting on their shoes? There will come a point in time where simple activities like this could become challenging for a parent or caregiver as their toddler begins to develop their sense of autonomy and seeks to navigate those situations on their own. Luckily, we can use those moments in time to truly support and encourage our children's independence in early childhood. Some ways you can help to cultivate independence in your child is to:

1. Explicitly role model desired tasks
2. Encourage your child to try tasks that they have not done before
3. Offer realistic choices
4. Respect their efforts to complete the task

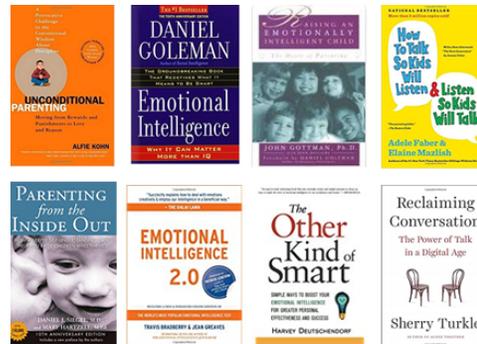
One of the simplest ways to build autonomy is by allowing your children the time and space to play and problem solve on their own. This means when you notice your child struggling with a task, take a couple extra minutes to watch and see if they can figure it out on their own before coming in to help. As much as you may want to intervene, allowing children to play and problem solve on their own gives them the self-confidence they need to continue working on their independence.

As they grow, continuing to guide your toddler in the right direction without solving the problem for them will boost their self-esteem as they learn to solve problems on their own. This translates into later life situations, where your child will undoubtedly be faced with decisions that they must make on their own when a parent or caregiver is not around. Starting early and starting young is key in helping your child's independence!

To access free resources or purchase resources for home, classroom, or office use please visit our website:



www.myframeworks.org



RESOURCES AND READINGS

by *Mabel Filpo*
SEL Programs Specialist

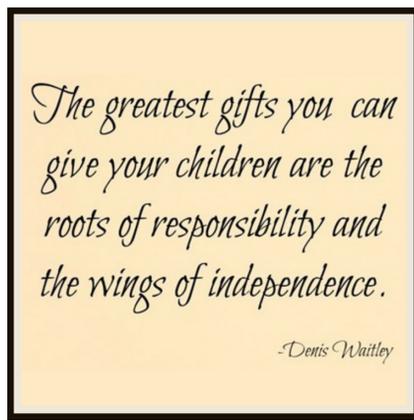
When cultivating independence, it is important to set expectations according to the child's age and needs. If children become overwhelmed with goals that are too high for their age it can affect their level of confidence. Ongoing communication and secure attachment allow parents to learn about their children's emotional needs. As children's self-confidence increases, they become more open about trying new experiences. Below is a list of resources to continue supporting healthy independence.

Children books:

- [Charlotte's Web](#) by E.B. White
- [Look! I Can Tie My Shoes!](#) by Susan Hood
- [You Are Your Strong](#) by Danielle Dufayet

Articles:

- [Independent Work: 5 Strategies for Encouraging Independence at Home](#) (The Homeschool Resource Room)
- [Encouraging independence](#) (Beyond Blue)
- [Children Developing Independence: What Is the Right Balance?](#) (Bright Horizons)
- [These 18 Things Will Help You Raise a More Confident Child, Says a Psychologist](#) (Independent)



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