

Is helping your kids really helping your kids?

There is a fine line between helping your child and doing things for your child. We all want to help our child but if we step in too far, then we don't allow our kids to build the skills they need to handle things on their own as they mature. There are several areas that parents jump in and do for their kids when they could give their child an opportunity to develop a skill.

Homework – be there for your child, but don't jump in and do it for your child or give answers when they could have taken some time and figured it out themselves. For example, in order for your child to have a great project, sometimes parents will step in and make the project for them. Be sure to assist your child in THEIR ideas, instead of leading them in the direction you think they should go.

Communication with adults – help your child express themselves to adults in a way that doesn't come across as disrespectful but helps the adult understand where the child is coming from. For example – if the child really likes to lead the class, instead of just asking to lead the class (and possibly coming across as a nag to the teacher), encourage your child to help the teacher in some way and then ask to lead the class. Mrs. Hall I cleaned your desk and the blackboard for you, could I possibly lead the class one day this week? Encourage your child to show interest in their teacher, ask how they are today, how are their children, how was their weekend? This helps build communication skills that will be invaluable later on in life.

Picking up after themselves – how often do we all clean up after our kids because it's easier than making them clean up after themselves? Each time you make the extra effort and make them clean up after themselves, the more likely they are to do it themselves in the future. Every time you pick up for them, the less they think about leaving their stuff anywhere and everywhere. So even though it's easier to clean up now than it is to change your child's behavior, the rewards of changing that behavior far outweigh the work it takes right now.

Social interactions – how many parents have jumped into the middle of a childhood squabble? In my experience, each time parents jump in the middle of a fight and call up the other child's parent it turns into something worse than if you would have let the kids work it out amongst themselves. In many cases, the parents end up not speaking to each other for years after the incident whereas the kids act like nothing has happened just a week later. Help your kids empathize with the other child's position and work disputes out on their own. It not only will preserve friendships but will give your child another valuable skill in social interaction.

I have witnessed several over-bearing parents who jump in to their children's lives in a way that undermines the child's confidence. They are well intentioned parents, but do not realize that speaking and acting for their kids too often will diminish the skills their child learns and lead to insecurity in using these skills.

Don't handicap your children by making their lives easy. ~Robert A. Heinlein