



In my 17 years working with preschoolers, one of the pieces of advice that has stuck with me the most is *"If they can, they must."* This basically translates as, "If a child is capable of doing something themselves, even if they struggle a bit, we need to let them try." As a parent myself, I am fully aware of how difficult this can be. So often as parents and teachers of smaller children, we want to jump in when we see a child struggling, or when they are just taking too long to get a task done. Our hearts ache at watching their frustration, or we get frustrated ourselves. Examples of this could be tying a child's shoelaces, even if they can do this themselves. Or getting them dressed in the morning, just because it's faster - and we all know the morning routine is stressful enough as it is. The problem with this is that we are teaching our children a kind of learned helplessness. They might start to believe that they are incapable of doing something without adult help. We can see the effects of this in the classroom, where learners get quickly frustrated, or just plainly state "I can't!"

To combat this, we start to use the mantra above - *If they can, they must.* If they can tie that shoelace, we need to let them. If they can dress themselves, no matter how painfully slowly, we should encourage them to do so. Simple tasks, such as unpacking their school-bag or placing their dishes in

"IF THEY CAN, THEY MUST!"



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the sink, are such easy examples of what even a three-year old can do. So what are the benefits to this? Well, kind of endless really. The most obvious of which is fostering independence, confidence and a good self-esteem. We can see this in our own school children who will so often walk into school self-assuredly, and have the confidence to tackle any task or challenge during their school day. These positive traits are also important in ensuring our children learn to problem-solve, or ask for help if they need it. This in turn helps them learn from their mistakes, and admit them without fear of judgment or rejection. Asking for help is an essential skill and we need to reinforce this in the pre-school environment. High self-esteem allows our children to be proud of what they achieve, whether it be getting an award, or just completing a difficult task. The positive character traits will encourage our children to try new things (essential for learning), adapt to change, learn initiative, and self-regulate

their emotions. Socially, these children make friends more easily, have a positive self-image, are more resilient and therefore less impacted by 'failures' or negative social interactions, either in person or online. So back to our mantra of *"If they can, they must"* - how do we know what our children can do? If you Google this question, you will probably get hundreds of sites telling you what your child should be capable of at specific ages. However in this scenario, I feel that the answer to this is up to each parent at home, and teacher in the classroom. As you get to know your child, you will become more familiar with what they are able to do by themselves. Children often live up to the expectations placed on them - small expectations produce small results, but if we let them, they can astound us. Inspire and encourage them to do chores around the house, and keep heaping on the praise. Sit back, put your feet up and let them do what they can, and sometimes, even what they can't... yet! ■

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