

Grade 8 October Part 3

Independence: an important attribute

Independence is important to all of us. We feel the need to be in control. In our society, independence is equated with self-worth. It is the one thing we fear losing in our declining years. It is the one thing young people, growing up, equate with maturity.

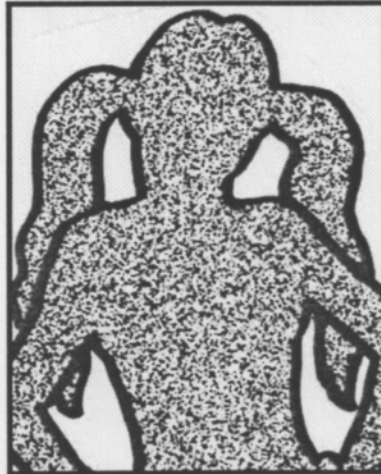
A natural growth pattern

For most of us the road to independence is relatively smooth. Of course, there are the usual teenage speed-bumps, the "you-can't-make-me-do-it" period. Thirteen-year-olds may want to 'drive' solo some of the time, want their own space. Rather than visit Grandma with the family, a daughter might insist on her right to stay home. Around this time, teens begin to look for part-time jobs. For the teen, financial freedom is a good indicator of independence.

Helping independence along

How can you as a parent assist in making this transition to independence easier? Begin by developing a supportive home atmosphere. Show your son or daughter that home is the safest place on earth.

Home is a place where they are accepted as they are. Home is a place where mistakes can be made. It is a place where they might do wrong without losing face. Teens need to know that their family cares. They need to see the family as trying to understand what they are going through and as trying to see their point of view.



Sociability is important

Teens can, should, and do have their own points of view. But to be independent is not to be unsociable. Teens also need to acknowledge the right of others to hold differing views. Even though she "dances to her own drumbeat" and does what she believes is right, a teen cannot ignore the feelings and needs of others.

As she develops a roadmap for her life, she needs your help. Listen! Focus on feelings! Recognize her growing need to feel in control! Following these steps, parents can help their teens mature and come into their own.

A few require additional help

For some, though, this quest for independence proves more difficult. It almost becomes an obsession. They refuse to follow home or school rules. They become defiant. Rather than listen to reason, it's "I'm old enough to do what I want!" To prove it, they stay out late, make snide and surly comments, bully, strike out uncontrollably.

Why? Don't necessarily see this as just a stage they're going through. Rather, look to it as a red flag for something else happening in other parts of their lives. Is it peer-pressure? Bullying? Attention-getting?

Parents noticing this type of extreme behavior need not despair. You are not alone. Talk to the school guidance counselor, or your family doctor, or your minister. These professionals can all help. They can offer sound counsel to both you and your child. In extreme cases they may even suggest other professional contacts.

Above all, show your teen that although you disapprove of his behavior, you still respect him for himself. Let him see that in looking to others for help, you are trying to help him grow into the responsible person he is capable of being.

"The more freedom a person has, the more important it is that he be responsible." – Raymond Rubicam