



Dennis wanted to stay home without a sitter. When he did, he learned about being alone.

"Home is where we have a chance to learn from our mistakes, and be loved in spite of them."

"Let me try! Let me do it!" is the chorus of childhood, and it's a wonderful, gallant announcement of growing independence.

This willingness to try deserves respect. Almost from birth, children tackle what to them are monumental challenges with magnificent courage, ambition, and persistence. If we watch for and encourage signs of eagerness to try in the very young, we will encounter fewer problems of cooperation through the difficult teens.

Signs of a child's readiness show in many ways. In his second year, Billy, until then an enthusiastic eater, made every meal a fight. He would knock the spoon aside and spill his milk on the floor. He wasn't rejecting his food; he was objecting to being spoon-fed. He wanted to try for himself.

Billy wasn't up to this new skill, but peace was restored when his mother let him try. For a little while, some of his food was wasted and he and his high chair needed mopping after meals. But his mother was rewarded, and so was he, by his happy mood and his increasing competence.

It takes time and trouble to let a child try. And it's easy for busy mothers to fall into the habit of whipping efficiently through some task instead of letting the child fumble messily through it.

"Let me squirt the water," begged four-year-old Jackie, reaching for the garden hose

in his mother's hands.

"Mommy can do it better. Don't touch. You'll just get wet," his mother replied, not realizing that such negative answers discourage a child and frustrate his eagerness to try.

Her answer was also a direct invitation to disobedience. How did she know he couldn't do it until he tried, reasoned Jackie. It looked so easy, and so fascinating! When he was alone, Jackie couldn't resist turning on the hose. But remembering her principal objection, he concentrated so carefully on not splashing himself that he drenched the car and knocked down the nasturtiums.

"I can do it! I'm not getting wet!" he cried triumphantly when his mother came running.

She had to make a quick choice between emphasizing the damage he had done, his real achievement in not splashing himself, or the punishment he deserved for disobeying her. A little of each was the constructive way out.

"That's good! Next time I'll let you help me. But look what you've done to the poor flowers. And the car is so wet, we can't go for a ride now!" said his mother, neatly making the point that he had punished himself for his own mistake.

Outright disobedience doesn't fall into the category of mistakes that can be permitted, but it's our job as parents to give enough opportunity and encouragement, along with necessary restraints, so temptation to disobey is not irresistible.

(Continued)

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