

Between the extremes of giving him too much freedom and too little freedom lies the ideal approach suggested by this noted child-guidance authority.

put away her toys. She goes right ahead with whatever she is doing as if she were deaf," the mother of a three-year-old complained, focusing on another aspect of a child's growth toward independence.

This brings me to one of the most important techniques in guiding children of all ages to a comfortable balance of cooperativeness and independence. Unquestioning obedience is not an end in itself, not a basic virtue. Our aim as parents is to guide children to take their own responsibilities happily and willingly. To do this, we must always con-

sider what is in the child's mind as well as what we want.

"Stop that, and put your toys away," strikes Ann as a senseless suggestion when she has turned from them and is absorbed in building a house of blocks. It's unnatural, too. Putting away toys does not represent order to her. Actually, it represents disorder—the disturbance of things she has arranged to suit herself. So she turns that well-known deaf ear, or protests, "No!" and starts a battle. The next step is punishment and tears.

"But she has to learn to be neat, and that the house belongs to the whole family," argues her mother in the same words we hear so often from parents of teen-agers.

She does, indeed, but an arbitrary command is not the way to teach her neatness. At three she does not comprehend orderliness except as something demanded by adults for their convenience, not hers.

If Ann had been playing with sand and pebbles, twigs and stones outside, no one would have asked her to put them away. Why is inside different? This is confusing. Play is a child's work. Calling a child away from play must be considered a serious interruption of his work. If we give fair warning, and are as courteous about interrupting as we would be with an adult, with something such as, "It's almost time to stop now for supper. I'll help you put the toys away so we'll have them nicely in place when you want them tomorrow," the child will respond happily. He'll learn that toys, inside, must be put away for safety and convenience.

Making Restraints Count

It is necessary to hold the hand of a small child at a street crossing. No spirited child cares for this, but he will accept it in good grace if his mother lets him go once the hazardous crossing is passed, and says, "Now! You can walk by yourself again." This lets him know that he is not being restrained arbitrarily or longer than needed for his protection. It puts emphasis on his independence to run freely when it is safe to do so, rather than on the limitation of his freedom.

Patty, 14, suddenly finds it irksome to come straight home from school "like a kindergarten." Her mother agrees that certainly she is ready for a little more freedom. "Just so long as you telephone and tell me which of your friends you are visiting," she adds, wisely combining a gratifying amount of independence with supervision she still needs.

Each Child Is Different

Each new step toward independence is a matter of delicate judgment. Recognizing these important moments is a real challenge, since children develop at widely different rates. A new liberty for one child may be totally inappropriate for another of the same age, or under different circumstances.

Billy could be trusted to cross the street alone when he was five. It was not safe for his sister to do so until she was seven. This was not a matter of difference in intelligence, judgment, or capacity for independence. It was entirely a matter of traffic having speeded up enormously in the interim.

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