

# Bringing the Lessons Home



## "Let me try."

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I have recently published a new book titled, "Raising freakishly well behaved kids." As a child counselor and play therapist for over 25 years and a parent for more than 18 years, I have learned valuable lessons from a unique set of experts; children. In the book, I highlighted 20 simple principles that we can use in our relationships with our own children and/or the children we work with.

In this article, we will focus on one principle, the concept of "Let me try." This simple principle has all sorts of benefits as well as some considerations to using it. The concept of letting children try is that they not only gain competency over the task, they also experience many different feelings around completing the charge – some comfortable feelings like pride and some uncomfortable feelings such as frustration. As parents, we can create opportunities for this when we parent from a place of respect and thoughtfulness. When that happens, it makes an impact not only on how our children see themselves and others, but also on how they behave, and as a direct benefit, in their relationships with us as their parents. When our children feel good, they behave accordingly. When we are proud of who our children are and how they behave, we feel positive about our parenting. When this cycle plays itself out we wind up with children feeling a solid sense of self and our parenting-esteem is high. Those things working together are the foundation of strong and loving child/parent relationships.



"Let me try" encourages us as parents to allow our children to experience frustration. You might be thinking, "why would I want to do that?" Here's why: when children struggle and experience frustration, they learn a lot of things. You don't have to teach them directly, the lessons they learn come from the experience of the struggle. Take an example of Henry, a five-year-old that cannot open the lid to his toy chest. Henry starts to get upset. If no one rushes to help, Henry will learn how to manage his frustration, persist, figure out if he needs or wants help, who he can ask for help, and how to ask for help. He may also find ways to solve the problem by learning to use his problem-solving skills (even if he cannot open the lid he is still developing the problem-solving muscles in his brain), which will help in future situations. If he does figure out how to solve the problem on his own, he learns that if you stick it out through frustration the feeling of pride and satisfaction is often on the other side. If he needs to ask for help, he learns how to socially and relationally negotiate how to do that. And what if Henry cannot open the lid, doesn't ask for help, and decides to move on? Well then he is learning how important particular things are to him. Perhaps even more critical is that many of these moments become a foundation for how Henry problem-solves, socializes, and even behaves. This is a big deal!

A consideration to applying this principle is time and patience. Children move at a different pace than adults; sometimes way faster, sometimes much slower. Either way, you have to be willing to watch them if they decide to rush or if they take their sweet time. While I was committed to letting my children try, if I needed to be somewhere else, I was not going to give them all the time they needed to work on tying their shoe, for instance. When you can, you do. Secondly, I often wanted to rush in and help. Like many of you, I don't particularly like watching people struggle, especially children, especially my children. You have to be able to back off and let your children, or the children you work with, struggle. This is grounded in reality; we all have to experience working through things so that we can manage the emotions that come with that and we can realize what we are capable of.

Practice the parenting principle of "Let me try" for a few weeks. It will take time for you and your child(ren) to get used to this happening with some regularity (I bet you have been doing this more than you even noticed, the difference is now you are noticing and doing it with thoughtfulness). This will be a fantastic opportunity to connect to your ability to be patient and model that for your child. Celebrate your child's wins and make sure to recognize yours too. The biggest prize of all is how you and your child feel about yourselves and each other. You got this!

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