

# Validating Your Child's Need for Independence



**BAINBRIDGE**  
**YOUTH SERVICES**

*askBYS.org*

---

COURTNEY OLIVER CLINICAL DIRECTOR  
HELEN BURKE COUNSELOR

---

## Why is independence important for younger children?

- It enables children to gain first-hand knowledge
- It enhances children's self-esteem
- It prepares children to handle failure and stress
- It gives the opportunity to choose what will make them happy

## What has happened to their independence since the quarantine?

- Pandemic Schooling vs. Homeschooling
- Leaves less room to make choices
- Less experience and validation outside of the home for independence
  - Peers, recess, school bus, conversations after school, sports, outside adult support, etc.
- Failure/success is often witnessed by family member

### What is our role as parents in fostering their independence?

- Scaffolding: a **temporary structure** used to support a work crew and materials to aid in the construction, maintenance and **repair of buildings**, bridges and all other man-made structures
- Our goal as parents is to be the scaffolding for our children. When the scaffolding is removed the child is able to stand on their own

### What are some ideas/tips to validate children's need for independence?

- Give clear boundaries and guidelines
- Listen to them (nonjudgmental and validating)
- Give them choices
- Ask questions
- Increase independence gradually
- Let them be bored
- Create family roles and what they contribute to the family (ex. Storyteller)
- Measure the situation to the relationship with your child. Which one will outlast?
- You know your child the best
- Find humor (share your vulnerability as a parent)





## Independence and Teenagers

### Outdated and unhelpful myths about teens

- Raging hormones cause teens to act out of control
- Adolescence is a time of immaturity
- Teens need total independence from adults

Adolescence involves important brain changes benefitting teens and all of us as humans - helps them prepare to leave home and address future challenges

- Shift on focusing from attachment to parents to attachment to peers
- Novelty seeking - learning to assess pros and cons
- Learning to push back and question authority
- Identity development - who am I? Learning from *experience*



## How has Coronavirus affected independence?

### Losses around independence

- Social engagement, going to school, experiences separate from parents, loss of certainty/predictability, loss of ritual and performance

Teens are grieving these losses in their own way - may be hard to see as grief

- Acknowledge
- Allow
- Listen

Teens are being deprived of something their brain is biologically built to need

- Connection to peers, learning from experience, novelty seeking

## How can you foster and support your teen's independence?

- Support yourself - put on your own oxygen mask first
  - Be present and practice active listening
  - Flip your perspective and outlook on adolescence - choose language carefully
  - Help them see their competence by trusting them with important jobs
  - Allow yourself to be influenced by your teen - encourage testing of new ideas
  - Involve teens in family decision making
  - Increase your tolerance for push back - responding vs reacting
  - Find small ways to connect in warmth, fun, humor, shared experience
  - Sit in the same space, physical contact, express interest in what they enjoy, invite them even if you know they will say no. Quality not quantity.
  - Help them tolerate difficult emotions and uncertainty by sharing your own emotions and uncertainties
  - Mindfulness/Mindsight Exercises
  - Apps - Stop Think and Breathe, Calm
  - Foster connection with/ability to name body sensations, emotions, thoughts
-

# Resources

## Read:

Hand in Hand Parenting (n.d.). *Supporting our teenage children*. Retrieved from <https://www.handinhandparenting.org/article/supporting-teenagers/>

Siegel, D. (2013). *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group.

Siegel, D. (2014). *Parenting from the inside out: How a deeper understanding can help you raise children who thrive*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group.

Greene, R. W. (2017, August 15). [\*Raising human beings: Creating a collaborative partnership with your child\*](#). New York, NY: Scribner.

## Watch:

Great video summarizing Siegel's work in *Brainstorm*: Siegel, D. (2014). *The power and purpose of the teenage brain (video)*. Retrieved from [https://youtu.be/\\_r\\_FmIjKd6s](https://youtu.be/_r_FmIjKd6s)

# BYS Programs

All available through secure  
video conferencing

## Free Counseling for Youth

- **BYS counselors are continuing to provide free, confidential counseling to youth ages 13-21**
- **go to [askbys.org](https://askbys.org) & click on Make An Appointment**

## Free Peer Tutoring

- **Peer tutors are working with students through FaceTime and other video conferencing apps**
- **email Susanne at:**  
**[tutoring@bainbridgeyouthservices.org](mailto:tutoring@bainbridgeyouthservices.org)**

## Free Parent Coaching

- **Free coaching to parents to help gain skills, guidance and support while parenting**
- **email us at:**  
**[appointments@bainbridgeyouthservices.org](mailto:appointments@bainbridgeyouthservices.org)**



@bainbridgeyouthservices

# Discussion

---

What is your takeaway? Are there creative ways to implement what you have learned with your own children/teenagers?

What ideas/tips could you suggest to others about validating children's independence?