

Cultivating independence in our

If we want to deepen attachment and cultivate independence, we first need to invite our children to depend upon us.

By Colleen Drobot

A recent study reported that North Americans place a high value on independence. We all want our children to grow up and stand on their own two feet; who wants their 30 year old still living at home? The problem is, as developmental psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld states, we are not birds that can be pushed out of the nest. In fact, the more we push independence, the more children will cling, give up, or look to someone else for help. If we want to deepen attachment and cultivate independ-

ence, we first need to invite our children to depend upon us.

Paradoxically, when we give the message to our children that we will take care of them, that they can count on us and lean on us, it helps them to relax and feel well nurtured. This kind of support encourages them to venture forth, and try new things on their own. I know this first hand from my own experiences. When I am having a problem with my computer, the more my husband denies me help, the more helpless I feel, and the more I want to give up. When he moves in and says, "Here let me help you," I feel grateful and endeared to him. I rest, and it renews my energy and confidence to figure things out for myself. In order for humans to stand on their own feet they need to feel well taken care of first.

Although we may understand this intuitively, it can be surprising to hear that to foster independence we must first invite dependence. We fear that if we give our kids an inch, they will take a mile. Yet the paradox that inviting dependence actually fosters independence is evident in studies done with toddlers. Toddlers, whose parents told them they would not be picked up, that they needed to walk on their own, were the ones who refused to do so. Toddlers whose parents picked them up generously were the ones who wanted to get down and run around on their own.

I worked for a wonderful principal who knew this secret. He was generous in inviting us to lean on him and was always supportive of his staff. The teachers were attached to him and he brought out the best in us; we actually worked harder for him than any other principal. He was an amazing leader on whom we could depend. All great teacher movies illustrate this. The teacher invites the student to lean on him/her until the student is strong enough to soar. We never see the master teacher being stingy or saying, "Don't come to me for support. You're on your own!" Instead they invite us into their classrooms, letting us know they are available for extra help. If we are struggling with an assignment, they give us the message "I am here for you when you need it."

I find this wisdom to be true over and over again with my own children. When I say to my daughter, "You're struggling with that shoe, let me help you tie



the laces” she wants to learn to tie them herself. When I say to my son who is struggling to write, “I’m going to help you. I’ll write every other line for you,” not only is he grateful, he is willing to try it himself rather than becoming overwhelmed and giving up. It is not that a nudge isn’t sometimes appropriate or that we can never say “no, I can’t help you right now.” Nor does it mean we should rush in to fix everything or interrupt them wanting to do something for themselves. Being generous in our willingness to take care of our children goes a long way in helping them mature and grow.

There is another benefit to inviting our children to depend on us. It is an excellent way to deepen attachment. When we know someone will be there for us, we naturally want to move in closer to him or her. We give them our hearts and are open to their influence. Dr. Neufeld humorously points this out in his video-series the *Power to Parent*. Can you imagine if we were dating someone and with plans to marry and he or she announced, “Now before we get married, I just want to get something straight. Don’t

expect me to do anything for you that you can do yourself!” We certainly wouldn’t be giving our hearts to them for much longer. When we first fall in love, we call each other “baby” and tell each other: “Your problems are my problems. You can depend upon me.” This deepens attachment and helps us to fall into a deeper love. This is true for our children as well, even our teens. If we can convey the message that we are on their side, we are in charge, and we will take care of them, our children can relax. They will rest in knowing we are in the driver’s seat and they can depend on us.

Faith in the developmental process and trust that we are our children’s best bet will help them to realize their full potential. And one day, if we are lucky enough to live a long life, they may invite us to depend on them. ★

Colleen Drobot is a registered professional counselor, parent consultant and educator with a private practice in West Vancouver. Colleen is a Faculty member of the Neufeld Institute and in her parent consultations works exclusively from the paradigm developed by Dr. Gordon Neufeld. She can be contacted at [cm drobot@shaw.ca](mailto:drobot@shaw.ca) or consult her website at www.drobotcounselling.com

Being generous in our willingness to take care of our children goes a long way in helping them mature and grow.

Tot & Teen DENTAL

“YOUR CHILD’S CARE IS OUR FOCUS”

COMMITTED TO . . .



DR. ANITA GARTNER
Certified Specialist in
Pediatric Dentistry

- Building relationships with families
- Promoting good oral health and well being
- Providing quality preventative and restorative services
- Creating a caring environment and a positive experience

219 – 179 DAVIE STREET, VANCOUVER
604-569-3669  www.tot2teendental.com



OPEN HOUSE: Sat. Jan. 22, 2011 from 10 am – 2 pm
Give Your Child the Gift of a Second Language

The ability to learn languages is highest between birth and age 6. Our French-English preschool program maximizes a child’s natural curiosity and ability to learn a second language during this important window of opportunity.

- Established in 1962
- caring, experienced & highly qualified bilingual teachers
- Bright, extra-spacious classrooms
- private indoor & outdoor play areas
- Introduction to French, reading, math, science and nature, music, crafts
- educational field trips

Limited space still available for SY 2010-11
Enrolling now for SY 2011-2012

(604) 261-1221

www.vancouverbilingual.com
Vancouver Bilingual Preschool

949 West 49th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 2T1

