

As parents, we don't dream about our kids being unsuccessful and unhappy. No! We want our children to be successful in all areas of their lives. We want them to find purpose and to be content. We want them to do lots of wonderful things! We hope they will be able to care for themselves and eventually, care for their own families. But, to get there, they first need to become independent.

A spirit of Independence is a toddler's willingness to try new things – and to keep trying at the things they *failed* at before. So, how can you help your toddler learn and grow in their self-reliance?

First, **create an environment** that allows your child to develop a spirit of independence.

Second, **encourage and support** your child as a unique individual through how you interact with them and the choices you allow them to make.

Qualities For Independence

There are four important qualities your toddler needs to develop independence.

Confidence – the belief that we can accomplish what we set out to do. Children with higher self-esteem have more *confidence* to take on challenges and the emotional strength to handle failure. It is important that a parent praises their toddler just for trying hard. Confidence can be harmed when we get angry at mistakes or negatively label children as clumsy or slow.

Motivation – the drive and enjoyment of completing a challenge or task. We can encourage motivation by letting them work through their challenges, giving gentle encouragement, and not being overly *critical* about the result. We can harm our child's motivation when we take over a task they're trying to do, or when we criticize them because it is not done as well as we could have done it.

Resilience – a willingness to try again after failing at something, or to adapt and *bounce back* when things don't go as planned. You can help create resilience in your child by encouraging them to keep trying and then praising the effort they put into the task.

Courage – when we do something, even when we're afraid. For your toddler, it might mean letting go of the table to take that scary first step. Going down the slide by themselves. Or overcoming their fear of the dark at bedtime. When we allow our children to work through their fears, then we teach them that it's *normal* to be afraid, but that they're strong enough to master it. We can, unfortunately, also teach fear and timidity. This can happen when we don't let our children work out their fears or when we step in immediately to make everything all right.

How To Encourage a Spirit of Independence

Work within their temperament.

Give them challenges and tasks.

Give them space.

Let them struggle.

No one wants to see their children struggle or get upset, but doing or redoing all those things they find difficult robs them of the opportunity to develop their spirit of independence. During the toddler years you have an incredible opportunity to help your child develop the foundation for independence that will carry them through life. Enjoy this time and let your little tot struggle as you gently guide and love them.

Resources include:

1. Foley, M. Child Development Institute. How to Build Your Child's Confidence and Self-Esteem. Found at <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/how-to-build-your-childs-confidence-and-self-esteem/#.XLdV6aZlDzj>
2. Zero to Three. Tuning Into Temperament. Found at <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/tuning-into-temperament>, accessed 7/14/2019.
3. Williams, Glenda MD. Pediatrician – Interview.