

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Take Time for Training



BY KIM DeMARCHI

My partner heard a story on the radio about a robotics team at UC Berkeley that tried to develop a robot that could fold laundry. For me, folding laundry is monotonous and I could

do it in my sleep. For a robot, folding laundry turned out to be incredibly difficult. "Once you start working in robotics," noted the lead professor, "you realize the things that kids learn to do up to age 10...are actually the hardest things to get a robot to do."

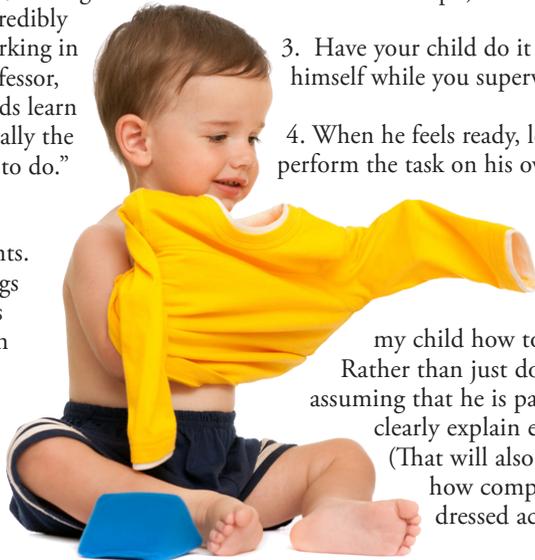
The story contains an important lesson for us parents. It turns out that a lot of things we see as "simple," the things we do every day without even thinking about them, are in fact extremely complex to children. It also dawned on me that we know what we mean when we ask our children to clean their rooms. But have we explained to them clearly what our expectations are and how to accomplish them? We tell our children to "go clean your room" and then we wonder how they could be in there for hours and yet the room isn't clean at all!

We may think that children learn just by watching, but often they need us to show them, as well as explain to them, how to accomplish things. It's not our role to do it for them, but sometimes we do need to

take the time to show and explain to them step-by-step how something is done. When a child has a hard time doing something, helping him learn how something is done will build his confidence and competence.

In general, this idea of "training" takes four steps:

1. Explain with kindness the task as you perform it, while the child watches.
2. Do the task together. (A sense of humor helps!)
3. Have your child do it by himself while you supervise.
4. When he feels ready, let him perform the task on his own.



So, let's say I'm interested in teaching my child how to dress himself. Rather than just doing it and assuming that he is paying attention, clearly explain each step. (That will also show you how complicated getting dressed actually is!)

So, let's take step 1. Explain, for the above example of getting dressed. For sake of brevity, I'll only give you step 1 for getting a pair of pants on. "When you put on your pants, you hold them in front of your body and make sure this tag is in the back. Then you sit down on the floor, put one hand on each side of the waistband, and put your right leg into the right leg hole. Make sure your foot is sticking all the way out of the pants otherwise you won't be able to pull them

up. Then, put your left leg into the left leg hole and wiggle it all the way to the bottom until you see your foot..." You get the idea. That's just Step 1 for putting on a pair of pants. There's still the shirt and socks, not to mention putting on and tying shoe laces!

Some of the best things I took time for training in were changing the sheets on a bed, loading a dishwasher, cleaning a bathroom, keeping the dresser drawers neat and organized, folding laundry, writing thank you letters and managing an online family calendar. Yes, these all make my job easier, but in the end, my children feel capable and confident.

Once this habit of helping and explaining is part of your parenting, you'll find that competence builds on itself: You may teach her how to put on socks when she's young but as she grows up, you'll teach her how to manage their calendar for the week or how to plan and cook a healthy meal. When a child begins to build confidence at a young age, she will be moving toward becoming a confident and competent pre-teen, teen, and adult.

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