

REFLECTIONS

Independence is a learned skill built through the accumulation of small achievements. Expecting children to help or manage tasks is about much more than the tasks involved; it's about the self-respect that comes from being competent and useful.

Success elevates self-esteem, but it must be earned.

Success feels best when we've been stretched and we've put in effort to attain it.

Success given to us but not earned is never ours to keep.

It takes time to develop the skills of independence and emotional resilience. Children learn them through small but important lessons over many years. They need to be immersed in these lessons at home, in schools and communities.

Children who have learnt to make much of small things, do it because it works. It gets them what they want, but it diminishes their resilience and increases their helplessness. Resilient children with the capacity to get over things and to get on with it, have good self-management skills.

There's an increasing awareness of the need for 'me' time - finding the time to be with your own thoughts and feelings, uninterrupted by the demands and pressures of others. We need to encourage this in our children - don't fill every moment with activity or respond to cries of boredom.

The challenges given to children must be achievable provided they make an effort.

For children to develop perseverance, they need to be challenged by things that make them want to give up. They need to learn to deal with discomfort. When well-intentioned adults step in too early, or when we don't need to, we are "telling" the child that we don't believe they can hang in there themselves. Rather, we should be telling them that we believe in their strength and their ability to hang in there and achieve.

It is inspiring to see disabled children enabled, but saddening to see able children disabled.

Children with disabilities courageously pursue independence, rejecting unnecessary help and demanding to try things on their own. So strong is their desire to be independent that they'd rather struggle to overcome their limitations than take the help that weakens their resolve. When their determination falters, carers step in and urge them on, knowing that the more they can do for themselves, the more fulfilling their lives will be.

Love and care are ever present in a form that strengthens, encourages and inspires.

Sometimes children with able bodies and minds are weakened by a love and caring that makes them dependent. We say that we want them to be independent, but in some strange contradiction we enjoy them needing us. We do things for them that they can do for themselves and subliminally tell them that they cannot manage or achieve by themselves.