

Please Don't Help My Kids

I am not sitting here, 15 whole feet away from my kids, because I am too lazy to get up and help them climb the ladder. I brought them here so they could learn to climb it themselves.

Posted by Kate Bassford Baker , September 14, 2012 at 05:50 PM



Dear Other Parents At The Park:

Please do not lift my daughters to the top of the ladder, especially after you've just heard me tell them I wasn't going to do it for them and encourage them to try it themselves.

I am not sitting here, 15 whole feet away from my kids, because I am too lazy to get up. I am sitting here because I didn't bring them to the park so they could learn how to manipulate others into doing the hard work for them. I brought them here so they could learn to do it themselves.

They're not here to be at the top of the ladder; they are here to learn to climb. If they can't do it on their own, they will survive the disappointment. What's more, they will have a goal and the incentive to work to achieve it.

In the meantime, they can use the stairs. I want them to tire of their own limitations and decide to push past them and put in the effort to make that happen without any help from me.

It is not my job — and it is certainly not yours — to prevent my children from feeling frustration, fear, or discomfort. If I do, I have robbed them of the opportunity to learn that those things are not the end of the world, and can be overcome or used to their advantage.

If they get stuck, it is not my job to save them immediately. If I do, I have robbed them of the opportunity to learn to calm themselves, assess their situation, and try to problem solve their own way out of it.

It is not my job to keep them from falling. If I do, I have robbed them of the opportunity to learn that falling is possible but worth the risk, and that they can, in fact, get up again.

I don't want my daughters to learn that they can't overcome obstacles without help. I don't want them to learn that they can reach great heights without effort. I don't want them to learn that they are entitled to the reward without having to push through whatever it is that's holding them back and **earn** it.

Because — and this might come as a surprise to you — none of those things are true. And if I let them think for one moment that they are, I have failed them as a mother.

I want my girls to know the exhilaration of overcoming fear and doubt and achieving a hard-won success.

I want them to believe in their own abilities and be confident and determined in their actions.

I want them to accept their limitations until they can figure out a way past them on their own significant power.

I want them to feel capable of making their own decisions, developing their own skills, taking their own risks, and coping with their own feelings.

I want them to climb that ladder without any help, however well-intentioned, from you.

Because they can. I know it. And if I give them a little space, they will soon know it, too.

So I'll thank you to stand back and let me do my job, here, which consists mostly of resisting the very same impulses you are indulging, and biting my tongue when I want to yell, "BE CAREFUL," and choosing, deliberately, painfully, repeatedly, to stand back instead of rush forward.

Because, as they grow up, the ladders will only get taller, and scarier, and much more difficult to climb. And I don't know about you, but I'd rather help them learn the skills they'll need to navigate them now, while a misstep means a bumped head or scraped knee that can be healed with a kiss, while the most difficult of hills can be conquered by chanting, "I think I can, I think I can", and while those 15 whole feet between us still feels, to them, like I'm much too far away.