



How and When Do We Get Out of the Way?

As children develop, they increase their competence over time. To foster their competence, we need to recognize when and how our involvement helps or hurts. Getting out of the way is a tough challenge and we have to remind ourselves that when we let them figure things out for themselves we are communicating the powerful message that “I know you’ve got this.”

Here is a quiz to help think about what getting out of the way looks like over the course of a child’s life:

- 1. 11-month old Sophia pulls herself up on wobbly legs and takes her first step. She inevitably falls. Your response:**
 - a. Ignore her.
 - b. Applaud and encourage her to use her own strength to stand back up, don’t pick her up to keep her from falling again and possibly getting a bruise or two.
 - c. Pick her up to keep her from hurting herself.
- 2. 15-month old Sophia is an avid walker and climber. She is eager to touch and hold everything. Your response:**
 - a. Use gates and other barriers to prevent her from falling and touching things that she shouldn’t.
 - b. Allow her access to stairs and all objects around the house but teach her to listen to “Stop!” and “Don’t touch that!”
 - c. Provide pillows and other soft protection for areas she can climb and explore fragile and other interesting things with her (then remove fragile items later).
- 3. 4-year old Sophia is building with blocks. Your response:**
 - a. Join her and let her be the foreman, even if it keeps falling over.
 - b. Remind her that she needs to put big blocks on the bottom to keep it from falling over.
 - c. Build a bigger tower next to her to show her how it is done.

- 4. 6-year old Sophia paints a picture of flowers under a big blue sky with a relatively small dog in the corner. Your response:**
 - a. Tell her that is the most perfect picture in the whole world.
 - b. Tell her that her flowers are out of proportion to her dog
 - c. Ask her to tell you about her picture.
- 5. 9-year old Sophia is doing a group project studying endangered animals. Her partners are not pulling their weight, which is frustrating for her. Your response:**
 - a. Encourage her to keep up the work and answer questions as they arise.
 - b. Join her in completing the project and tell her you will work with her to make the “best project ever”.
 - c. Once she is done, tell her that she could have worked harder like “Danielle”.
- 6. 12-year old Sophia is abruptly rejected by her best friend for “not liking boys and still playing with dolls”. She is devastated and cries, “Courtney’s telling everyone I am a baby!” Your response:**
 - a. Tell her “I never liked Courtney anyways, this isn’t such a big deal.”
 - b. Tell her “Courtney’s mother is my friend so you better work this out.”
 - c. Acknowledge how upsetting this is and ask “How do you think you can handle this is?”
- 7. 15-year old Sophia has just broken up with her boyfriend. She brushes by her parents and says “You just wouldn’t understand!” Your response:**
 - a. Tell her that if she lost some weight, she would be able to find another boyfriend easily
 - b. Tell her that she is too young to be dating anyways.
 - c. Listen quietly, acknowledge her feelings and help her think through how to take care of herself in this moment.
- 8. 17-year old Sophia is preparing for college. Your response:**
 - a. Remind her that she has to go to your alma mater because you have connections there.
 - b. Help her write her essay and embellish her attributes.
 - c. Listen closely to her interests and help her clarify what she is looking for in college environment.

*adapted from **Building Resilience in Children and Teens** by Dr. Kenneth R. Ginsburg*