

On Parenting Gifted Children: Getting Stuck and Letting Go

by Vidisha Patel, EdD

Editor's Note: This piece by SENG Director Vidisha Patel is part of the 2012 National Parenting Gifted Week Blog Tour. Be sure to check out the full schedule of blogs and follow along!

She sat on the floor in her room struggling with the zipper of her jacket. The clock was ticking and we were going to be late for school. Her brother was getting agitated because he wanted to be at school early to meet up with some friends. "I can do it Mumma. Just leave me ALONE!!!!"

My six-year-old daughter was determined to zip up her jacket all by herself even if it took all day. Normally she is the one who is insistent on being on time. Today she was focused entirely on the task of zipping up her jacket. Nothing else mattered: not her brother's desire to get to school, or my need to get to work. The more I tried to help her, the more agitated she became and the tighter the zipper stuck. Finally, I walked away and let her be. About ten minutes later, my six year old emerged with a smile on her face and a zipped-up rain jacket, ready for school

Parenting gifted children is a journey that requires patience, persistence, and a positive attitude. When my kids were born over 16 years ago, I had no idea about the journey that lay ahead of me.

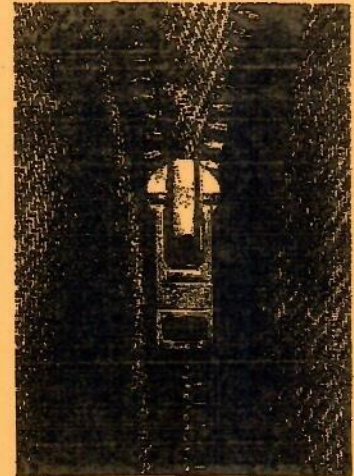
Fast forward four years. It was New Year's Eve, and she really wanted to help. I had my head in a cupboard, trying to find enough plates for all of us to eat. She asked what she could do to help, and, without thinking, I suggested taking the glasses out to the living room. Immediately she stacked six glasses on a small plastic tray just as I emerged from the cupboard. I tried to warn her that it was too many glasses and maybe it would be better to take two trips. "I can handle it Mom! I know what I am doing." CRASH!!!! All the glasses slipped off the tray and landed in a heap of shards on the kitchen floor. Then came the tears, the anger, and finally the "I can't do anything right." Quietly, I cleaned up the shards and found some new glasses for everyone to use.

Somehow it was easier to be patient with a six year old who was struggling to help herself get dressed. But a ten year old who thought she knew best about how to carry a handful of glasses and didn't understand the ramifications of glass fling everywhere just didn't warrant the same level of patience (or so I told myself).

Months earlier, I would have reacted with irritation and insisted on teaching a "lesson" about being more careful. This time, I let it go. After about 20 minutes, my ten year old was back with a smile on her face and an apology about breaking the glasses. I explained to her that they were only glasses and it could have happened to anyone. I suggested that perhaps next time she could take fewer glasses and more trips.

My insistence on helping her would have led to a battle, tantrums and the very outcome that I was trying to avoid.

Many gifted kids enjoy their independence. Their souls are frequently older than their physical years, and they feel capable of taking care of things themselves. Once fixated on a task, gifted kids have a tough time letting go. Their focus on the task at hand limits their ability to step back and assess the situation from a different perspective. And instruction from an adult frequently brings out their stubbornness and determination to fix the situation themselves. In some instances, this persistence can pay off, but in others, it can cause frustration and lead to accidents.



Just as my little girl has learned to be patient with her need to do things her way, I, too, have learned to give her some space and allow her to learn to do some things on her own. Giving her the freedom to try out new things her way and make some mistakes along the way has helped her grow in self-confidence. She is able to make independent decisions and accept the consequences, both positive and not so positive. And learning how to give her the space to grow has helped me become more patient, too!

Vidisha Patel, EdD, has a doctorate in counseling psychology and practices as a therapist in Sarasota, Florida, where much of her work is with gifted children and their families, with a focus on stress and anxiety. She is also the treasurer and a member of SENG's Board of Directors.



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