



A strategy for helping your child with special needs learn to problem solve.

Or Fire the Nanny and Butler

Moms and Dads of children with special needs tend to take on the role of butler and maid far too long for the well-being of their son or daughter. As a consultant I have seen how the pain and guilt of having a child with developmental challenges affects the expectations parents have for their son or daughter with [Autism](#), Asperger, Pervasive Developmental Disability or [Attention Deficit](#) Disorder.

I have observed how they anticipate every need, problem solve for them, communicate for them, pick up after them as well as take care of every activity of daily living. Many of these children never have to initiate, think of a plan or carry out that plan. Many of these children are not required to communicate or think for themselves. Many become upset, throw tantrums when their needs and wants are not immediately met, so families do it all to keep the peace.

Then to add to this challenge, parents of special needs children may both work and have siblings to help with homework, getting to soccer practice or carpooling to play dates, making them feel they cannot take the needed time to wait for their child with special needs to communicate or problem solve.

- Moms are choosing clothing and dressing their children.
- Moms are carrying the laundry basket, doing the laundry and putting clothes away.
- Dads are choosing lunch items, making the sandwich and packing lunch boxes.
- Dads are carrying backpacks for their students and handing them to the teachers or hanging them up.
- Moms are grabbing coats and jackets for every outing and taking them to the car.
- Parents are pouring, stirring, cutting, opening and even getting all food items from the refrigerator or cupboards to save time.
- Some families ignore when their child leaves personal items on the floor, takes off shoes and leaves them in the middle of the living room or empties out toy boxes and book shelves, later to pick everything up and put it all in its place instead of their son or daughter.
- Parents are brushing kids' teeth, brushing kids' hair and applying deodorant because the school bus is about to arrive.

So with the very best of intentions, parents are reducing opportunities for their children to make choices, request, think for themselves, problem solve, initiate, become independent and are increasing the likelihood that they will need prompting and cueing throughout their lives in order to live and learn.

So how do parents get started?

- First they give themselves permission not to be perfect.
- Second, they stop allowing the feeling of guilt to overprotect their son or daughter from the opportunity to learn.
- Third they start helping their child problem solve on non-school days when expectations are less.
- And they choose manageable activities or pieces of activities.
- Parents need to play dumb more, be confused and forget items more often.
- Parents need to offer choices and encourage choosing.
- Parents need to learn to wait (sit on their hands) and allow their son/daughter to try first. Then they can give a verbal prompt and maybe a visual before doing it for them.

- Allow time to process questions and expect them to respond (voice, gesture, picture, sign) in some way.

Parents Can Also . . .

- Identify a job or two their child can do to feel like a contributing part of the family.
- Maybe they can unload the silverware tray of the dish washer and sort items into the drawers.
- Maybe they can carry the laundry basket into the laundry room or just put laundry in and close the washer or dryer door.
- Maybe he or she can put placemats on the table for a meal during the weekend and put out enough napkins for the whole family.
- Expect your son or daughter to pick up after themselves on the weekends.
- Have your son or daughter choose between two pieces of fruit going into his/her lunch in the evening, or make a sandwich and pack it.
- Tell your child it is cold outside and allow them to think about what he or she might need, before getting him or her the coat.
- Set up an art project and forget the paper or the paint and ask them what is missing, where they think it might be and help them go find it.
- Ask them what items they need if they are going to have cereal (bowl, cereal, milk, and spoon). Then ask them where those items are and have them go get them.
- Put food items out of reach at the dinner table and wait for them to ask, look, reach for an item before giving it to them.
- Have your child carry at least one item into the house and put it away after grocery shopping with you.
- Make sure your child carries their own backpack to school and from the car into the house after school.
- The night before school offer your son/daughter choices in clothing (pants or skirt, blue or red blouse, brown or black shoes etc).
- On the weekend give your child a choice between activities (park, ball) (walk or cooking)(TV or music).
- Don't open boxes, jars, packages for your son before he/she asks or before they try themselves and then ask for help. Let them try to put the straw in the juice box themselves.
- When it is time for a bath, ask them which knob to turn, hot/cold and how much water you should add (more, less).

Parents Remember . . .

Each time you expect your child to initiate, make a request, respond to a question or find a solution to a situation you are increasing cognitive development and helping your son or daughter move towards independence. Each time a parent waits to give their son or daughter an opportunity to make a choice or make a plan to meet a need, you are decreasing dependability and increasing self-advocacy.

So, I ask you moms and dads to **fire** yourselves as maids and butlers early on for your children with special needs, and hire yourselves back as coaches, teaching essential skills for preparing for the game of life.

node	12401
------	-------