

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

It's a common complaint: "Parents today do too much for their kids." Is it true, though? And what does that even mean? What's the "right" amount of help to give our kids? Does that really exist? Read perspectives from three parents who are right there in the trenches, struggling with this concept each day.

—Nicole Balza

## ARE WE DOING TOO MUCH FOR OUR KIDS?

I DON'T KNOW any parents who have found the perfect balance of allowing their children to figure things out and doing things for them. This is something I've struggled with since I became a mother. Like most parents, I question my parenting decisions daily and ask God to use even hasty decisions for good.

**Something that my husband and I do quite a bit with our children is let them get bored.** My oldest and youngest have always been creative, so this boredom leads to them building, creating, and reading. So many discoveries take place that never would have happened if I had inserted myself into their play. My middle daughter has wanted to be entertained since she was an infant, so this is an area where we need to work more. At this time, she is 12 years old so she should be able to find things to do, but her personality doesn't lend itself to creative tasks. We often have to get her started with something before we walk away. I think a lot of parents can be too eager to make sure that their children are always happy. I don't want my kids to be upset, but I really want them to feel confident and comfortable without me. I think giving them space provides these opportunities.

**An area where I'm not as comfortable being hands off is with my children's technology use.** There is way too much online that I can't control, and it's so easy for children to get sucked into a device instead of feeling that healthy boredom. My oldest child is a freshman in high school, and she just got a phone for the first time. My husband and I are still trying to help her learn how to use her phone responsibly

without spending too much time on it. This involved a phone contract and the expectation that she would use her phone primarily for communication instead of entertainment. With my other children, we set timers for their technology use, limit what they view or play, and take screen time away if we notice that they are acting more agitated than usual. These are boundaries that are important to my family.

**I want to stress that I drop the ball all of the time.** I get a fork or a plate or a water bottle for my children when they could easily do it for themselves. I often have to remind myself that they are capable and I'm not doing them any favors by doing even the small tasks for them. I pray for wisdom for all of my decisions, but the ones that involve my own family are central in my thoughts.

Parenting is all about growth. Praise be to God that I have the opportunity to learn along with my children and every day I have the chance to try again.



*Karyn Clemons and her husband, Ben, are raising two daughters and a son in New Ulm, Minnesota. Karyn teaches at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School.*

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**ONE OF OUR KIDS,** about six years old at the time, was given the task of vacuuming the upstairs bedrooms. This was an era when our vacuum cleaner was obnoxiously large and clunky. He asked, "Will you help carry the vacuum upstairs?"

“Will you also help me plug it in?” he asked. “I can’t get the outlet cover off.”

Once the vacuum was turned on, he struggled to maneuver it in any direction. I placed my hand above his hand and began guiding the process. When the job was complete, I said to him, “Nice work!” even though I had done most of the work.

Did I do too much to help my son?

### EVALUATING THE SITUATION

As I surveyed the carpet, it was clear that I had done the brunt of the work even though I hoped he might complete the task on his own. But I also wanted him to know that I saw his struggles. I wanted him to cherish knowing that his father guided and equipped him.

## **We want our children to live increasingly independent of us and yet increasingly dependent on their gracious God.**

The years have passed, and our children have grown. Instead of maneuvering clunky vacuums, they are maneuvering the clunkiness of interpersonal relationships, personal finances, safe driving (yikes!), and decisions about their future. The older they get, the more we strive in our parenting to guide them in taking hold of life’s responsibilities on their own. And yet, we want them to know that we see when they struggle and we will continue to guide and equip them.

### CREATING BALANCE

Ultimately, we want our children to see beyond us. We love, guide, and equip them to the best of our ability. But we remind our children that they have a gracious God who loves them even more than we do! They have a perfect Father in heaven who guides, equips, and has uniquely created them to do good works which he has prepared in advance for them to do (Ephesians 2:10).

With that in mind, we strive for a healthy tension in our parenting. We want our children to live increasingly independent of us and yet increasingly dependent on their gracious God.



*Joel Russow and his wife, Jill, are raising four children ages 9 through 16 in Mequon, Wisconsin. Joel, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, notes that Jill contributed to the article as well.*

ARE WE DOING too much for our kids? In many ways this is a subjective question. “It depends” is the first thing that comes to my mind. What does it depend on? In my experience, three major things have tempted me to do too much for my children.

#### **1) I value my own comfort over my children’s growth.**

We know that very little growth happens in our comfort zones. Discomfort is essential to growth. If this is true, then we know we need to let our kids sit in discomfort. We have to let them make mistakes. We have to let them fail so they can get back up and try again.

I also know that we, as a society, value comfort. Striving for comfort is embedded into our daily lives. It is so uncomfortable for us as parents to watch our children be uncomfortable and make mistakes. It’s uncomfortable to let them fail. Even though we value growth, oftentimes comfort takes precedence. We choose to slow our children’s growth in order to appease our own comfort. So we do too much.

**2) I worry about what others think.** If I don’t feel comfortable watching my children’s struggles, sometimes I feel like other people, even strangers, don’t like seeing my children struggle even more. We worry that people will judge our kids or think that we are bad parents. When the path looks smooth for our children, there seems to be less judgment. So we work hard to keep the path smooth. So we do too much.

**3) I want to be their savior.** As a mom, there is something so special when my children come to me to fix their problems and, even more so, when I can do it. I can do plenty of things to help them. However, we, as parents, are not their savior. Jesus is. So when they are uncomfortable, it isn’t our job to save them from that discomfort. It is our job to direct them to the One who can give them true peace, true comfort, and true healing. We can never do too much.

So are you doing too much for your children? That answer is between you and your heavenly Father. When I start to get anxious about my children and their discomfort (and let’s be honest, my discomfort), the promise that God is always with them and is always pursuing them brings me great comfort. It’s also important for me to remember that those promises apply to me as well.



*Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, are parents of four biological kids. Jenni is the Women’s Ministry Director at St. Mark Ministries, Green Bay, Wisconsin, and owner of Embrace Your Story Coaching.*

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