



# The Parent Alarm

Parents' protective instincts want to steer children far away from dangerous outcomes and toward safer, immediate solutions. What are some of the reasons that we jump in as soon as our parent alarm rings and try to fix their problems or correct their mistakes?

- ❖ We worry that they will not be successful.
- ❖ We think that they are not trying their hardest.
- ❖ We worry that they will embarrass us or reflect poorly on us.
- ❖ We see our children as reflections of ourselves; they become the product we have produced, and we want our work to seem perfect.
- ❖ We are uncomfortable when we make mistakes and assume our children share that insecurity. We wish to spare them the discomfort.
- ❖ We have strong standards of right and wrong, and we don't want our children to stay too close to the boundaries of what we believe is wrong.

Short of scenarios that challenge safety, we should try to let children figure things out on their own. Sometimes doing nothing is precisely what they need. Paying attention but doing nothing to interfere sends children the wonderful message, "I trust you to handle this."

Every time we try to solve problems for them, we undercut their growing sense of competence. If we solve all their problems, they remain dependent on us. When we support their problem-solving skills by getting out of their way or by offering gentle guidance only when necessary or when they ask for it, we foster their growing sense of self-reliance and independence.

In deciding when to intervene, parents should first establish who owns the problem at hand. If the child owns it (when the problem is one that the child experiences in her own life independent of her parents, such as conflict with a friend or a teacher), parents can be most helpful if they don't try to solve the problem. They can get out of her way or help her to problem-solve by using techniques like role-playing or choreographed conversations. On the other hand, if parents own the problem or if a child's behavior interferes with the parents' lives (such as coming home late and waking parents), the parent has the right to be more directive.

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

*Ok. You've got this Parent Toolkit, The Parent Alarm*