

HELPING YOUR CHILD SUCCEED

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
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What do we mean by the above statement? Here is an example. We feed babies, but we expect healthy fourth graders to feed themselves. We know babies can't do this. As children get older we assess what they are capable of doing. If we feed a healthy fourth grader that would be **enabling** them. We typically progress from providing complete support to coaching/teaching to self-reliance. Sometimes when children face mental health issues or learning disabilities, it is hard to know whether you are being considerate of your child's difficulties or limiting his growth by taking on tasks he can do himself.

Support should always empower your child to move toward greater stability and more independence. The goal of **support** is to build up resilience and develop coping strategies.

A few examples of support include:

- ◆ Learn about your child's diagnosis and treatment so you know what is helpful and what isn't.
- ◆ Acknowledge your child's feelings.
- ◆ Model healthy coping skills for handling frustration, anger and anxiety.
- ◆ Set clear boundaries for all family members.
- ◆ Coach your child through problems she cannot handle without assistance.

Enabling is different from supporting. When you enable you unintentionally reinforce an undesired behavior. All parents do this to some degree because it's only natural to want to shield our children from pain, fear, failure, etc. **Enabling** undesirable behavior also occurs when we give in to complaints or demands because we want to avoid conflict.

A few examples of enabling include:

- ◆ Covering up for things your child did, forgot to do or did poorly
- ◆ Intervening to prevent your child from experiencing disappointment, rather than helping him work through his feelings
- ◆ Protecting him from the natural consequences of his actions

We have to learn to accept our own discomfort when we see our children struggle if we are going to help them grow. By taking smaller risks, children build coping skills and confidence.

Unfortunately, mental health symptoms can vary from day to day, making it hard for parents to know what is support and what enables mental health challenges. Keeping track of circumstances surrounding success is helpful. Considering the amount of sleep your child got, stressors that recently happened and upcoming stressors, hunger and thirst, medication consistency and physical issues can help you assess whether your expectations are realistic at any given time.

Below are some things you might say to help encourage your child in situations that fall somewhere between "can" and "can't":

- ◆ "I know you don't feel up to it, but I'd like you to come anyway. If you're still too tired once we get there, we don't have to go in."
- ◆ "Yes, this will be challenging, and I think we can find ways to help you manage it."
- ◆ "It's normal to be nervous about this. What's one thing you can do to decrease your anxiety to a more manageable level?"

Excerpted from <https://childmind.org/article/supporting-vs-enabling-a-child-with-challenges/>