

# THE IMPORTANCE OF LETTING CHILDREN MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS

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As parents we willingly take on the responsibility of every aspect of our baby's well-being from the moment they are born. Their reliance on us is absolute.

Over many months to come, basic skills such as learning to hold and eat from a spoon are acquired through repeated effort (and a good deal of mess!). If we came to the rescue every time food failed to make it to our baby's mouth, we'd be spoon-feeding them forever more.

A recent study of 400 children over eight years\* revealed that toddlers with the most controlling mothers had poorer social skills and academic performance at the age of ten; and that excessive adult intervention can result in passive, unmotivated and anxious young people deprived of the long-term ability to make their own decisions.

There is a growing body of evidence that children need to be able to make their own choices, even if they aren't always the 'right' ones. For example, nagging children to do homework may be doing them more harm than good. If you allow them to choose not to do their homework, they have to go to school and face the consequences: a lesson in itself.

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At Bassett House we believe children learn more effectively when they are encouraged to do things for themselves, to think creatively and form their own ideas.

A 'can do' attitude and growth mindset are in Bassett's DNA. If you were to say 'I can't do that' to one of our pupils they would inevitably bellow back 'I can't do that YET!' This mantra has become a shorthand for understanding that resilience and perseverance pay off. It is embedded in every aspect of school life from our curriculum, classroom, staffroom and sports fields to the playground and outside-school activities.

Throughout the school you will see our Tree of Mastery. This features our school mascot Bassett Bear facing a challenge, engaging with it, persevering when the going gets tough then successfully climbing to the top of the tree having mastered the challenge.

Our children are encouraged to do their own research, argue their own points of view and problem-solve rather than learning by rote. They discover their opinion matters and feel free to step out of their comfort zone when faced with new challenges.

Outside the classroom, our wide range of clubs,

enrichment activities and residential trips allow children to push their boundaries and let their imaginations soar beyond the confines of the familiar.

The development of leadership and team-building skills are encouraged with a host of club activities such as sports, orienteering, martial arts and drama, whilst experiences such as rigging a boat, cooking on a campfire and building shelters in the wild are the character-building stuff our residential trips are made of.

Of course our first priority is to keep children safe. We don't condone complete freedom of choice and advocate common sense, non-negotiable boundaries. As you'd expect, they learn being disruptive in class or unkind to a classmate is unacceptable.

Overall if you consider how many things your child has control over, you may be surprised how few real decisions they get to make. We encourage you to ask your child if there are things they'd like to be in charge of. Young children could be allowed to choose which clothes to wear and older ones have more of a say in their after-school activities, or have input into their senior school choices.

We adults can help children to make the right decision by discussing the pros and cons of each choice. We can point out it's a good idea to have a Plan B if their decision turns out to be the wrong one.

Whilst it is understandable for us to want to smooth the path for a child and help them every step of the way, we need to remember they should be allowed to find out for themselves and learn by their mistakes. Much like we did. ■

*\*The Thriving Child by Dr William Stixrud and Ned Johnson is published by Penguin Life.*

**The next open day is 5 October 2018, 9.30-11. To book a place please call Thalia Demetriades 020 8969 0313. 60 Bassett Road, W10 6JP [www.bassettshs.org.uk](http://www.bassettshs.org.uk)**

