

The Importance of Letting Go

Parents do many things while raising children that contribute to their growth and development. Parents provide the basic security that builds the foundation for all aspects of development, comfort their children when needed, offer interesting toys and experiences to stimulate their curiosity, and in general guide their children through the mazes of life. It turns out, however, that one of the most important things a parent does over the course of a child's growing up is simply the act of *letting go*.

Babies are so cute that sometimes we feel as if we will never want to put them down and let them out of our arms. But put them down we must and time after time we are faced with the need to *let them go*. One day we will let go of our baby's hand and allow her to take those first steps on her own. We know that she may fall down, may even hurt herself in the process, but we let go anyway. We let go because in our hearts we know that she needs to make her own way in the world and these first steps are the beginning of that process. When she becomes steady on her feet and a more expert walker, we will let her explore the world in which she lives - the house, the backyard, the playground - even though we know that tables have sharp corners, backyards have sharp tree branches, and playgrounds have structures she is not ready to climb even though she tries. We will let her go to explore even though we know that there may be some bruises in her future.

Then one day she will want to ride a two-wheel bicycle and we will let go of the training wheels and release our grip on the back of the seat even though we know that she may fall after a few turns of the pedal. We let go because she wants to do it herself and ride her bike "like the big girls do." We may even let her ride her bike around the block by herself. Maybe.

We will also leave her to climb into the school bus by herself or we may leave her at the door of her school. We will let her move on from the personal life of the family and we will let her enter the wider, public world of school where the bruises may not come from the sharp corners of tables or the thorns of rosebushes but from the academic and social challenges of the classroom. We know that there may be days when she returns home bruised from a failed spelling test or a best friend's snub but we let her go anyway.

Bike riding and starting school will be followed by letting her go on her first date and letting her take the car out by herself. Here, too, sharp corners and bruises may await her as she ventures out without us. But still we let her go. Why are we so brave?

We let our children go because as it has often been said, our job as parents is to first give them their roots and then we must let them spread their wings. We let them go because we know that it is each child's destiny to become independent and to navigate his or her own way through the sharp corners and the inevitable bruises of life. We might like to hold them forever and protect them from those bruises but we know we can't. We know that we have to put them down, let them go, and then watch them make their own path into the future. We are able to do this because we know that if we have done our job well, if we have helped them put down their roots, then even though we have let them go, we will still be connected.

T.J. Corcoran, JD, MEd
Founder, The Corcoran School