

Helping Children Choose

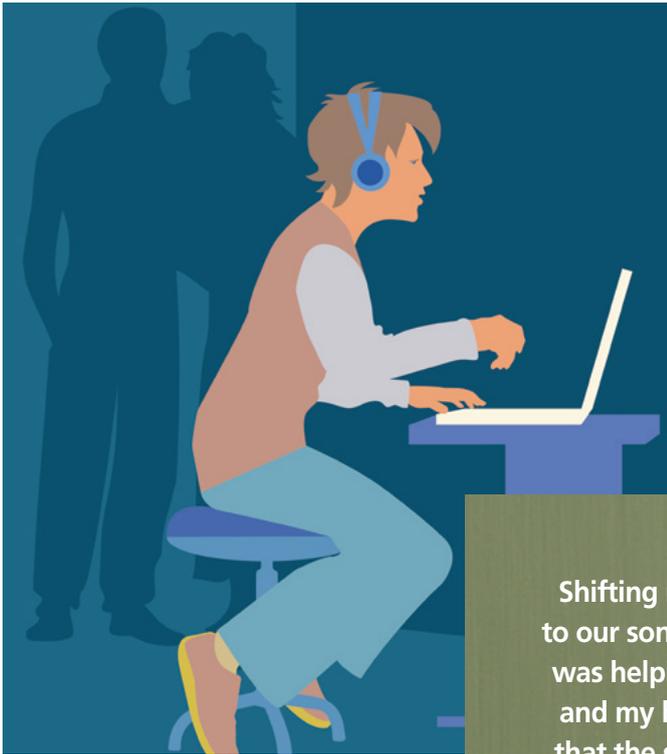
*Teaching our children how
to make their own righteous decisions will
help them throughout their lives.*

We all want the best for our children. We strive to teach them and direct them as they move from infancy to adulthood. But is it possible to direct them too much? How can parents lead appropriately without stifling their children's independence or impeding their personal growth?

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves."¹ Parents can play an active, guiding role in their children's lives while still recognizing their children's individuality and respecting their agency. When we teach our children true gospel principles and lead them by example, we pave the way for them to make their own righteous decisions.

In the following accounts, two mothers share how they were inspired to trust their children to find their own way.





Backing Off

By Denalee Chapman, Idaho, USA

My husband and I have always had high expectations for our children. When they were younger, I monitored their progress in school through an online platform. Each day I'd log in to look at their current grades and assignments. I made them complete their assignments before they did any fun activities. For the most part they stayed on top of things. But then when Bryan was in high school, he decided to match wits with me.

At first he was just a little slow getting things done. But soon it became a battle between us. When I found out about missing schoolwork, I would take away Bryan's computer and phone time and even make him go to bed earlier. When he finally completed the assignment, I would call the school and persuade the teacher to accept the tardy work. Day by day our relationship got more strained. I became exhausted and stressed. When I tried to reassure Bryan that I loved him, he would respond with a grunt.

I spent weeks pondering, praying, and studying, trying to figure out a solution to the problem. Finally, I had an epiphany. I realized that my relationship with Bryan was more important than his grades. If I backed off, what was the worst that could happen? He might not graduate. Could I

live with that? When I realized that the alternative was staying on the road of constant contention, I decided I could.

Instantly I was filled with immense peace and relief. I loved my son no matter what, and I didn't want to damage our relationship any further. I knew that my job as a parent was to teach my children and help them on their path to an eternity of progression. I wanted Bryan to become a

mature adult who took responsibility for his choices.

That day when Bryan came home from school, I told him that our relationship was more important to me than his grades. I gave him a choice: We could continue the way we had been, with me checking up on him and helping him at every step. Or I could back out completely and let him take care of everything.

"If I back out," I warned, "I won't talk your teachers into accepting late work or intervene in any way. Do you want some time to think about this?"

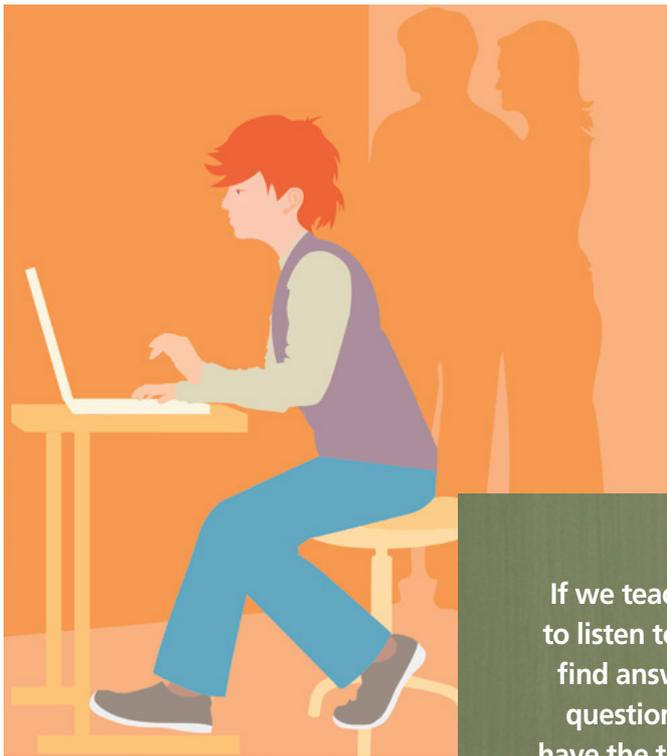
Bryan's face lit up. He didn't need any time to decide. He was ready to take full responsibility.

Life got instantly better for both of us. The rift between us healed, and Bryan and I developed a comfortable relationship of love and respect.

For the last two and a half years of Bryan's schooling, I did not know what his grades were. At first, not knowing made me nervous, but I could see that shifting the responsibility to Bryan was helping him grow. I realized that this approach would not always be the best for each child and circumstance, but my heart told me that the sense of independence my son felt was just what he needed. And what had once taken up a huge chunk of my time and thoughts was no longer an issue.

Bryan graduated with an advanced honors diploma. Later he served the Lord on a mission, using the autonomy we felt inspired to allow him to develop. Bryan has become an instrument in the Lord's hands, and I couldn't be prouder of him.

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Letting Evan Choose

By Lisa Hymas, Idaho, USA

When my oldest child, Evan, was halfway through the fifth grade, we needed to decide which middle school he would attend the coming year. The public school system where we lived at the time (Florida, USA) allowed him to apply to four different middle school programs. As I spoke to other moms and looked up school ratings, trying to sift through the various options, I was not sure which school he should attend. I had been praying about schools for a while, hoping we would be led to pick the best one for him.

One day I had the impression that Evan should decide on his own which school he should attend. At first I thought, “How can I let a 10-year-old make a big decision like that?” But I felt strongly that he needed to begin to learn how to receive personal revelation.

I spoke with my husband about my impression. We sat down with Evan and told him we thought *he* should choose which school he would attend the following year. We reviewed with him the steps he needed to follow to make his choice. We suggested that he make a list of what he liked and didn’t like about each school. We explained that after he had considered each option carefully, he would need to make a choice. Then he would need to

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pray to Heavenly Father and ask if his choice was right. We assured him that we were prepared to support his decision.

Evan and I spent the next few weeks attending open houses and gathering information about each school. During the car rides we had the chance to talk about his list of the pros and cons for each one.

Finally Evan had all the information he needed. I

reminded him that he needed to make his decision and then pray and ask Heavenly Father for help in knowing if his choice was right. I told him that he would feel either good or uncertain about his choice. The next day he told my husband and me that he had made his decision. He had prayed three times and felt good about it. Not only were my husband and I confident in his choice, but Evan was too. He knew

that the Spirit helped direct him to a certain school because that is where Heavenly Father wanted him to be.

We can strengthen the rising generation by giving our children the chance to make important life choices. If we teach them how to listen to the Spirit to find answers to their questions, they will have the tools and skills they need to withstand the world. ■

NOTE

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 284.



WISE PARENTING

“Wise parents must weigh when children are ready to begin exercising their own agency in a particular area of their lives. But if parents hold on to *all* decision-making power and see it as their ‘right,’ they severely limit the growth and development of their children.”

Elder Larry Y. Wilson of the Seventy, “Only upon the Principles of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 104.