

Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

Get your developmental match right

WORDS Michael Grose

Parents of large families tend to have seen it all before. But if you have only one or two kids, you're pretty much learning it all on the run. Here are some ideas for matching your parenting style to your kids' development.

If you're the parent of a small family (two children or less), your learning curve is steep as there are so many firsts: first steps, first time at preschool, first experience of school camp, first transition from childhood to adolescence.

The extensive list of 'first' experiences means you constantly need to acquire **new knowledge** ("Now, how does this toilet-training work?") and **new skillsets** ("Hmm. How do I persuade a reluctant toilet trainer?").

The other challenge, of course, is matching your **parenting with the developmental needs** of each stage in your child's young life.

You know how it goes: Just as you finally learn how to successfully tackle an **independent-minded toddler**, he suddenly moves into a more compliant but far more inquisitive stage. You think, "What's with all the questions? Do I have to answer them all?"

NEW STAGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NEW CHALLENGES!

Parents of large families can draw on their previous experiences, but when you lead a small crew it's largely trial and error. **Here are some ideas for matching your parenting with your child's developmental stage:**

- 1 Follow** your child's lead. Kids will let you know in many and varied ways what they require from you.
- 2 Learn** from other parents who have been down the parenting track before you. Ask questions: "Does your six-year-old...?" "Is it normal that...?"

3 When a previously successful strategy no longer serves its purpose, this is evidence that your child has **moved** to a new developmental stage. Now you need to ask yourself whether you have too.

4 Follow the lead of professionals such as child care workers, teachers and parent educators who have broader experience of specific age groups.

5 Learn more about **developmental stages** and their parenting requirements. Each stage brings new challenges and new opportunities. Understanding the developmental needs of children helps you match your parenting to their age and stage.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said: "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself". This wisdom definitely applies to parenting, especially in smaller families. So if it's a struggle to get it right, don't be too hard on yourself. See it as an opportunity to learn.

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