

The Efficiency Dilemma

Let's TALK Kids

Claudia Quigg

A child is not a labor saving device.

Yesterday I watched as a young mother across the street tried to walk through her front door. This doesn't sound like a difficult task, except that she had a toddler on one hip, a diaper bag over her shoulder, and three grocery bags dangling from her arm. The preschooler walking in front of her was fascinated by the pouring rain gushing from the gutter above the porch, and he wanted to take a closer look. The mother's face was marked with desperation as she patiently tried to inch her son forward in an attempt to get in out of the rain. Reluctant to give up on this interesting display, he finally relented and allowed himself to be pushed through the front door.

What different goals parents and children have for every experience! Parents are looking for efficient task completion. They have a long list of things that really must be done. They tend to be mentally on to the next job before the last one is finished.

Children, on the other hand, live entirely in the moment. They see each experience as an opportunity for exploration and learning. They notice everything and want to know about all of it.

Our ordinary world is fascinating to children. Folding the laundry, driving to school, raking leaves—these mundane tasks are the occasion for a thousand questions in young minds, whether they are verbalized or not. Parents just want them done, but children want to help fold, talk about the traffic, and examine every leaf in the pile.

As simple an act as tying shoes is, for parents, something to get done before dashing out the door.



For a young child, tying shoes is a chance to practice tying, to see what happens if you tie a different way, to tell about the boy at day care who has red shoe laces, to untie and tie again, or to stuff the laces down into the shoes if tying proves too difficult, after all.

Putting away the groceries can be done in minutes without a child's help. But with a little one around, it may take a bit longer. Groceries may need to be categorized (cold? not cold?) They may have to be stacked (how many cans high?) They need to be named (what is an artichoke, anyway?) They need to be discussed (I don't really have to eat an artichoke, do I?)

What interests your child? From infancy through adolescence, our children are engrossed in the world around them. Following their gaze will tell us what fascinates them.

Parents can't afford to do it all the time, but they discover joy when they can take the time to be "in the moment" with their children. They build memories to bring them joy as they go to sleep at night, as opposed to just a list full of check marks.

Parents see tasks as a means to an end. For children, the task is an end itself. Parents don't have a moment to lose. And neither do their children.

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