

Let them do it badly

A short book about doing everything for your children
because it's quicker, and what they don't learn

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, which is doing things for your children that they could do for themselves, not because you've decided they can't, but because it's quicker, and cleaner, and easier to watch than letting them do it badly. The shoes. The zip. The cereal. The bag. The form for the trip. The phone call. At every age there's a version, and at every age the reason is the same. You've got four minutes and they'd need twelve.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the hand goes out for good reasons and that you shouldn't feel bad about it. Time is short, mornings are short, mess is real, and watching a child fail at a zip is hard in a way that nobody warns you about. The second is that the reasons are true on any given morning and false over a childhood. Quicker today means the same job again tomorrow, and the twelve minutes you save are twelve minutes your child doesn't spend learning the thing, so that next year you're still saving them. There's research on what children learn from being allowed to do things, and from being stopped, and it points the same way. The third is practical. Pick one job. Decide what done looks like for a child that age, not for you. Give them the minutes it needs. Then keep your hands to yourself. Chapters 19 to 23 cover how.

This book isn't about chores as punishment, or about making children useful, or about toughening anyone up. It's about the bad version of a job being the only version a child can start with, and what happens when they never get to start.

Three cautions.

Some jobs stay with you. Anything at the hob, anything on a road, medicines, the bath for a small child, the front door. This book is about the zip and the cereal, and nothing in it means handing a six-year-old the kettle.

If your child finds a task much harder than other children of their age, and it isn't one task but most of them, that may be more than age. The NHS pages on ADHD and autism describe what to look for, and the first person to talk to is usually their teacher, who can involve the school's special educational needs coordinator. A GP is the next step. Chapter 24 is written with that child in mind and some of the method changes.

And if your child has a disability that means a task genuinely isn't theirs to do, the method still applies to the tasks that are. The question is never whether to do everything for them. It's which things.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

The shoes, the zip, and the cereal

It's quarter to eight. Ava is four and she's sitting on the bottom stair with one shoe on the wrong foot and the other shoe in her hand, looking at it as though it's arrived from somewhere. You've asked her twice. You're standing in the hall with your coat on and your keys in your hand, and the thing that happens next is so quick you don't notice yourself deciding it. You crouch, you take the shoe, you swap the wrong one over, you do both straps, and you're at the door in twenty seconds. She didn't object. Why would she.

Upstairs, Leo is nine and his school bag is on the landing where he left it, and you know without looking that the reading book isn't in it and the water bottle is still in the sink. So you put them in. You've been putting them in since he was five. At the kitchen table, Maya is fourteen and she's got a form for a trip that needs a signature and a phone number and the name of a doctor, and she's held the pen for a minute and then said "can you just do it". You did. It took you forty seconds and it would have taken her ten minutes, most of which would have been asking you what to put.

These are invented, but I'd guess yours are close. Notice the shape. There's a job. The child could do it, badly and slowly, or could learn to. You do it, well and fast. Nobody argued. Nothing went wrong. The morning worked. And the same three jobs are waiting tomorrow, because nothing about this morning changed who can do them.

Some words. **The takeover** is the moment your hand goes to the job and finishes it. **The hand** is the reflex itself, the hand that's already moving before you've decided anything. **The quick version** is the job done by you in a fraction of the time. **The slow version** is the job done by the child, badly, at three times the length. **The go** is the child's attempt, whatever it produces. **The margin** is the extra minutes the slow version needs and the quick version doesn't. And **the least help** is the smallest thing you can do that keeps the child's hand on the job, which chapter 8 is about.

I'll use "badly" throughout, and I mean it kindly. Badly is the standard every first attempt meets. The shoes on the wrong feet are a bad job, and they're also the only job a four-year-old can do, and the one that comes before the good one.

Before you go on, do one thing. For a week, count the takeovers. Every time your hand goes to a job the child could have had a go at, make a mark, and next to the mark write roughly how long you saved. Most parents who do this get a large number of marks and a small number of minutes. That's the shape of the habit, on paper, and it's worth seeing before I argue with it.

Why the hand goes out

Before I argue with the takeover, I want to be fair to it, because it isn't neglect and it isn't laziness. It's the opposite of both. The hand goes out because you're paying attention.

It's quicker. Every morning has a clock in it, and the slow version doesn't fit. You're not choosing between the child learning and the child not learning. You're choosing between being on time and not.

It's cleaner. The cereal poured by a four-year-old is on the table and the floor and in the box. The sandwich made by a nine-year-old uses a knife and three surfaces. You'll clear it, and clearing it is longer than doing it.

It's hard to watch. A child doing a zip badly is a child struggling, and the struggle lands in you before it lands in them. The hand goes out to stop a feeling that's partly yours.

The result is better. The shoes are on the right feet. The bag has the book in it. The form is legible. When you do it, it's done, and when they do it, it's done in the sense that something happened.

Some of it's safety. A child pouring from a full kettle isn't a child learning, and the hand that stops them is right.

And it's love. Doing things for people is one of the ways love comes out, and a child is the person you'd most like to do things for. Handing them the job can feel like handing them a burden.

There are needs under all of this. To be on time. To keep the house from going under. To spare your child a struggle. To have it done properly. To keep them safe. To look after them. Those are real, and the method later in the book is built to meet them. What I'll show is that the takeover meets them today and undoes them over time. It's quicker this morning and slower over a childhood. It spares a struggle now and stores up a bigger one. And it looks after them in every way except the one that matters at eighteen.

I should say what this book isn't. An earlier book in this series, *They're nine, not lazy*, is about the opposite mistake, expecting a child to manage things an adult would, and calling them lazy when they can't. This book is about expecting nothing, because expecting nothing is faster. They're two sides of one coin and the coin is not looking at what a child that age can actually do. If you recognise yourself in both, that's common, and the answer to both is the same, which is to look.

"It's quicker"

It is. I'm not going to argue that a four-year-old does a strap faster than you, or that a nine-year-old packs a bag in the time you'd take. On any given morning, the quick version is quicker, and the belief is true.

The problem is the word "morning". The takeover saves you the margin today, and it saves you nothing tomorrow, because tomorrow the job is exactly where it was. Ava can't do her straps any better on Wednesday for you having done them on Tuesday. So you do them on Wednesday, and on Thursday, and next year, and the year after, and the twenty seconds a day adds up to a number that I won't invent for you but that you can work out from the marks you made in chapter 1. The quick version isn't quick. It's a small payment that never ends.

The slow version is expensive for about a fortnight. Then it gets cheaper, and then it gets free, and then it's the child's job and not yours. That's the whole trade, and it's a good trade, and the reason it's hard to see is that the cost of the slow version lands this week and the saving lands next year. The habit is built on the difference in timing. You're always choosing between a real cost now and a saving you have to believe in.

It's a bit like stabilisers on a bike. They make this ride easier, and they make the next ride exactly as hard as this one, and the day you take them off is the day the ride starts getting easier for good.

There's a bigger version of the same point. Giulia Dotti Sani and Judith Treas, using time-use surveys from eleven Western countries between 1965 and 2012, found that the time parents spend on childcare rose over that period, for mothers and fathers, and that the better educated spent more of it, with that gap widening in a number of countries. That's a finding about averages across countries and it says nothing about your morning. But it does say something about the story you might be telling yourself, which is that parents today have less time for children than parents used to and so have to take the shortcuts. The surveys say parents are spending more time, not less. The takeover isn't what a time-poor generation does. It's what a very attentive one does, and attention that's always pointed at the job leaves the child watching.

So the belief is true on Tuesday. Chapter 21 is about how to find the margin, and it's smaller than it looks. For now, the thing to hold onto is that "quicker" has a hidden word after it, which is "today", and that you've been paying the today price for a long time.

"They can't do it yet"

Sometimes that's true and it settles the matter. A two-year-old can't do a zip, whatever they think. But "they can't do it yet" mostly means "they can't do it well yet", and those are different sentences, and the second one is true of every job a child has ever learned.

Two things about children are worth knowing here. The first is that the wanting comes before the ability. Ulrich Geppert and Ursula Küster, in a small observational study of forty-one children from nine months to six and a half years, watched what happened when an adult interrupted a child in the middle of a task. As the children got older, more of them objected and insisted on doing it themselves, in stages that the researchers matched to the child's growing sense of self, and they treated that insistence as an early form of the drive to achieve things. It's a pilot study and it's old. But anyone who has lived with a two-year-old will recognise the finding, because "me do it" arrives well before the doing is any good.

The second is that children want to help long before they can. Felix Warneken and Michael Tomasello showed that children of eighteen months, barely talking, would help an adult who'd dropped something or couldn't reach, without being asked and without reward. It's a laboratory study of infants and it isn't about shoes. But it suggests that the impulse to take part in what the adults are doing is there early, and the interesting question isn't how to put it in. It's what happens to it.

What happens to it is the hand. A child who insists on doing the zip and is allowed to, badly, for a fortnight, ends up doing the zip. A child who insists and is overruled, because there's no time and it's easier, learns something too, which is that the zip is yours. Neither child could do it well at the start. Only one of them got to start.

The NHS page on teaching everyday skills says to wait until you think your child's ready, and if it doesn't work out, to leave it a few weeks and try again. That's good advice and it's the opposite of the takeover, because the takeover never tries and never leaves it a few weeks. It just does the job. The same page says not to make it into a big deal, and that a child who's learned to use a spoon may still want to be fed when they're tired. That isn't failure. It's a child.

So "they can't do it yet" is worth turning into a question. Can they do it badly? If they can, they can start, and the bad version isn't a reason to wait. It's the first version, and there isn't another way in.

"They'll make a mess"

They will. The cereal will go on the floor. The toast will be buttered on the plate and then on the table. The bag will be packed with the wrong book and a sock. The mess is real and the belief is accurate, and I'm not going to tell you it isn't a cost.

What I'd ask is what the mess is the cost of. It isn't the cost of the child being careless. It's the cost of the slow version, the same way the margin is, and it's paid for the same fortnight. A child who pours cereal for two weeks pours it onto the floor for about six days, onto the table for about four, and into the bowl after that, and those are my guesses and not a finding, but the shape is right. The mess is front-loaded. The takeover keeps the mess at zero and keeps the pouring at zero too.

There's also a second job hiding in the first. The cereal on the floor is a job, and it's a job a four-year-old can do badly, with a cloth and a lot of enthusiasm. The takeover usually takes both jobs, the pouring and the wiping, because you've got the cloth in your hand already. If the child pours and the child wipes, you've given away two things, and the second one is arguably the more useful. Most of adult life is clearing up after yourself.

I'd also gently ask what standard the mess is being measured against. A kitchen after a nine-year-old has made a sandwich is worse than a kitchen after you have. It's not worse than a kitchen after a meal. It's a few crumbs and a knife, and the reason it looks like a lot is that it's a mess you didn't make, and other people's mess always looks bigger.

The honest version of the objection is that you haven't got time for the mess on top of the margin, and that's fair, and chapter 21 is about finding the time. But I'd notice that the mess objection tends to get applied to the jobs that are messy and then quietly extended to the jobs that aren't. Doing a zip makes no mess. Packing a bag makes no mess. Filling in a form makes no mess. If the mess were the reason, those three would have gone to the child years ago.

"I can't stand watching"

This one is more honest than the others and I'd like to spend some time on it, because I think it's closer to the centre of the habit than time or mess.

Watching a child do a thing badly is uncomfortable. The strap goes through the wrong loop and you can see it going through the wrong loop, and your hand is halfway there before you've thought. The wrong book goes in the bag. The pen hovers over the form and the tongue comes out. There's a feeling that comes up, somewhere between impatience and pain, and the takeover ends it. It's worth being clear that the takeover ends your feeling. The child, quite often, was fine.

Jelena Obradović, Michael Sulik and Anne Shaffer watched a hundred and two parents and their children, around the start of school, working on a set of structured tasks together, and measured second by second how much the parent was directing the child against following the child's lead. They then looked at the children's self-regulation and their executive functions, the researchers' term for the skills of holding a plan in mind and stopping yourself, on separate tasks. The finding was that parents who stepped in more during the moments when the child was actively working on the task had children who did less well on those measures. Stepping in when the child was passive or stuck didn't show the same pattern. It's a single study and it can't say what causes what. But it draws the line in an interesting place. The stepping in that seemed to cost something was the stepping in that happened while the child was already doing it.

That's the hand. It doesn't go out when the child is stuck and asking. It goes out when the child is in the middle of doing it wrong, because that's the moment that's hard to watch. And that's also the moment, if the study's right, when the child is doing the most learning, because a child in the middle of doing it wrong is a child working something out.

So the discomfort is a signal, and it's worth reading correctly. It isn't telling you the child needs you. It's telling you that you're watching someone learn, which looks like failing, and that you'd rather not. That's human. It's also, I'd argue, the thing to sit through, and chapter 20 is about how. For now, the next time the hand starts to move, ask whose problem it's solving. If the child hasn't asked, it's yours.

"They get so frustrated"

They do. Ava cries at the strap. Leo throws the bag. Maya says "I can't" and pushes the form away. The frustration is real and it's loud and the takeover makes it stop, and if the point of parenting were to keep the volume down, the takeover would be right.

I'd put it differently. Frustration is what learning feels like from the inside, at the point where the wanting has arrived and the ability hasn't. Nobody is frustrated by a thing they can't do and don't care about. They're frustrated by a thing they can nearly do, and "nearly" is where all the learning is. If you take the job away at the first sign of it, you've taught something, and what you've taught is that the feeling means stop.

There's an old, small study that speaks to this. Audrey Hokoda and Frank Fincham observed twenty-one third-grade children with their mothers doing puzzles, some of which were solvable and some of which, unknown to them, were not. The children had already been sorted by whether they tended to give up or keep going when things got hard, which the researchers called helpless and mastery patterns. The mothers of the children who kept going behaved differently during the impossible puzzles. They stayed focused on the task and kept their mood up, they were responsive to the child's requests for help and to how able the child felt, and when the child said "I'm no good at this", they answered it. It's twenty-one children and the authors say to treat it with caution, and I do. But the picture it draws is of a parent who stays in the room, stays cheerful, and doesn't take the puzzle.

That's a different thing from doing nothing. It's not folding your arms while your child sobs at a shoe. It's staying near, saying "that's the hard bit", and not moving the strap. The frustration passes faster than you'd think when nobody makes it into an event, and it passes into something, which is the strap going through the right loop, and a face you'll want to remember.

One more thing. If the frustration is yours as well, if the third failed attempt at the zip is producing a voice you don't like, that's a different problem and there's an earlier book in this series about it, *Not in front of the children*. The takeover is sometimes a way of not shouting, and I'd rather you took over than shouted. But there's a third option, which is the margin, so that the zip isn't happening at the moment you've got least in you.

"I'm just helping"

Of course you are. Nobody thinks of the takeover as taking. It feels like help, and often it started as help, and the line between them is hard to see from the inside. So here's the line, as I'd draw it. Help is what keeps the child's hand on the job. The takeover is what moves it off.

If Ava's strap is stuck and you hold the shoe still so she can push, that's help. Her hand is still doing the strap. If you take the shoe and do the strap, that's the takeover, however kindly. If Leo can't find the reading book and you say "look in the pile by the bed", that's help. If you go and get it, that isn't. If Maya doesn't know what to put for the doctor's name and you tell her the name, that's help. If you take the pen, the form's yours. The question in every case is the same. Whose hand is on it when the job gets done.

Researchers who study parenting have a term, autonomy support, for the cluster of things parents do that keep the child's own hand on their own life, offering choices, taking the child's view, explaining rather than commanding, and letting them try. Its opposite in their vocabulary is psychological control, which is getting compliance through guilt, withdrawal, and pressure. Emma Bradshaw, Mireille Joussemet, Richard Ryan and colleagues pooled two hundred and thirty-eight studies with over a hundred and twenty-six thousand children and young people, across regions and ages, and found that autonomy support went with better wellbeing and psychological control went with worse, and that the two were separate, so that a parent could be high or low on each. The correlations were moderate, around a third, which in

this kind of research is a real and not a large effect. It's a summary of mostly cross-sectional studies and it measures something broader than shoes. But the direction is consistent and it held across cultures.

I'm not going to tell you that doing up a strap is psychological control. It isn't. What I'd take from the research is narrower, which is that the child's own hand on the job is a thing that matters in itself, over and above whether the job gets done, and that help which keeps it there is a different act from help which takes it off.

So the practical term is the least help. When the child is stuck, the question isn't "how do I get this done" but "what's the smallest thing I can do that leaves them doing it". Hold the shoe. Point at the pile. Say the name. Then take your hand away. It's slower than the takeover and it's the only kind of help that runs out.

"They're only little"

Ava is four. Of course you do her shoes. The sentence is true and it has an expiry date, and the thing I'd ask you to notice is that the sentence doesn't expire. It updates.

At four it's "they're only little". At nine it's "they've got enough on". At fourteen it's "they'll only make a mess of it". At nineteen it's "they're stressed with the course". At twenty-four it's "the housing market is impossible". The child changes and the reason changes and the hand doesn't, and if you're honest about the first year of your own adult life, you may remember a parent who was still making the phone call.

There's a body of research on what parents of young adults do, under the name overparenting. Chris Segrin and colleagues surveyed six hundred and fifty-three pairs of parents and their adult children across the United States, and defined overparenting as directing, assisting, problem-solving and monitoring at a level that doesn't fit the child's age. The parents who did most of it were the more anxious ones, and the adult children on the receiving end reported poorer ways of coping, which in turn went with more anxiety and stress. It's a survey, it's one country and it can't tell you which way the arrow points. But the finding about the parents is the one I'd hold onto. The takeover, at that age, tracked the parent's anxiety and not the child's need.

A later study from the same group, Jian Jiao, Margaret Jane Pitts and Chris Segrin, asked a narrower question with two hundred and fifty-six parent and adult child pairs. Were parents adjusting how

much they did to how much their child wanted to do for themselves? The answer was mostly no. What parents reported doing wasn't related to what the child reported needing. The researchers' reading was that parents may overparent to meet their own needs rather than the child's, and that's a cautious sentence about a survey and I'd keep it cautious. But it's the same shape as the hand at four. The hand doesn't check first.

None of this means that a nineteen-year-old with a parent who makes their phone calls is doomed. Most aren't. What it means is that "they're only little" is a reason that has to be re-examined every year, on purpose, because it won't retire on its own. The habit is happy to be twenty years old. The question to ask, at every age, isn't whether they're little. It's what a child that age can do badly, and whether they've been allowed to.

"It's my job to look after them"

It is. I'm not going to argue with the job. I'd argue with the definition, because "look after" has quietly come to mean "do", and it used to mean something wider.

Looking after a child includes feeding them, keeping them warm, keeping them safe, and getting them to school with a bag. It also includes the thing that's harder to see, which is arranging matters so that one day they don't need you to. A parent who does the shoes at four is looking after Ava. A parent who's still doing them at seven is looking after this morning, and the cost is falling on a version of Ava who hasn't arrived yet. Both feel like care. Only one is care for the whole child, including the future one.

There's research suggesting that the letting go starts earlier than you'd think. Annie Bernier, Stephanie Carlson and Natasha Whipple followed eighty mothers and infants, measuring at twelve to fifteen months how much the mother supported the child's own attempts at a task, alongside her sensitivity and how much she talked about what the child was thinking. At eighteen and twenty-six months they tested the children's executive functions, the early forms of working memory and stopping yourself. Of the three parenting measures, support for the child's own attempts was the strongest predictor of the toddler's skills at both ages, independent of the child's general ability and the mother's education. It's eighty families, and the effects are the modest kind that this sort of study finds. But the measure that mattered most wasn't warmth or attention. It was whether the parent let the one-year-old have a go.

Nobody thinks of that as neglect. It's the thing you do with a baby without noticing, holding the spoon near the mouth and letting the baby take it. Somewhere between the spoon and the shoe it gets lost, and I think it gets lost because the jobs get more consequential. A baby with yoghurt on its face is fine. A four-year-old with shoes on the wrong feet at the school gate reflects on you. The looking after starts to include looking after how it looks.

So I'd put it this way. Looking after them includes looking after who they'll be, and who they'll be is made of the jobs they were allowed to do badly. A parent who does everything is doing a great deal. It's the wrong list.

"They don't want to do it"

Ava doesn't want to do her shoes. Leo doesn't want to pack his bag. Maya, offered the form, looks at you as though you've handed her a tax return. That's true, and I'd ask you to consider why it's true, because I don't think the wanting was ever absent. I think it was there and it was handled.

Chapter 4 had the finding that the wanting to do it oneself arrives early, uninvited. The interesting research is on what happens to it afterwards, and the best I've found comes from Mexico. Lucía Alcalá, Barbara Rogoff and colleagues asked mothers in two communities in Guadalajara about their six-to-eight-year-olds. In an Indigenous-heritage community, many children were reported to take on complex family work on their own initiative, minding younger children, cooking, running errands, without being asked. In a community with generations of Western-style schooling, few children were reported to contribute to household work at all, and seldom of their own accord, and those children were more often in activities that adults organised. In a companion study, Andrew Coppins and colleagues asked sixteen nine and ten-year-olds directly, and almost all of them said that children want to contribute to the family's work. The samples are small and it's reports rather than observation. But it's a picture of the same wanting going two ways depending on what the adults around it did with it.

What the adults do with it, in the households I'm writing about, is the takeover. The two-year-old who wants the spoon gets fed because it's quicker. The three-year-old who wants to help with the

washing is given something else to do because the washing takes twice as long with help. The five-year-old who wants to crack the egg gets to watch. Each one is reasonable. Together they're a curriculum, and what it teaches is that this is the adults' work and your job is to wait. By nine the lesson has taken, and the child who doesn't want to pack the bag is a child who learned, correctly, that the bag was never theirs.

I'd notice, too, what "want" is being measured against. A nine-year-old doesn't want to pack a bag in the way they want a biscuit. Nobody does. The question isn't whether they'd choose it but whether they'll do it without a fight once it's plainly theirs, and the answer, in most houses, after the first fortnight, is yes. The fight is about the change, not the job.

So "they don't want to" is true and it isn't the end of the argument. It's the result of the argument you've been winning for years. It can be unwon. It just takes the same fortnight.

"They'll do it wrong and I'll only have to redo it"

You won't, though. That's the thing I'd ask you to consider. You could not redo it.

Leo makes his bed and the duvet is rucked and one pillow is on the floor. That's a made bed. It's a bed a nine-year-old made, and it will be slept in tonight by a nine-year-old who'll have no complaint. If you go in afterwards and straighten it, two things happen. The bed is straighter, which nobody needed. And Leo learns that his making of the bed was a rehearsal for yours, which is a fair reason not to bother next time. The redo doesn't fix the job. It cancels the go.

The same goes for the sandwich that's mostly butter, the form with the phone number in the wrong box, and the shoes on the wrong feet, which I'd let walk to school once, because feet are quite good at reporting that. A job done badly by the child is a job done. If it isn't done to the standard you'd set for yourself, that's because it wasn't done by you, and it wasn't supposed to be.

There's an earlier book in this series, Good enough went out on time, about the habit of polishing your own work past the point where anyone could tell. This is that habit pointed at someone else's work, and it's worse, because your own work is at least yours. An apprentice's first joint is loose and it's still the joint that teaches the second one.

The honest core of the objection is that some jobs have a standard the child's version doesn't meet. The bag has to have the reading book in it or there's a note from school. The form has to be right or Maya doesn't go. Fine. Then the standard is part of the job, and the way to hand it over is to hand over the check as well. "Look in the bag and tell me the three things that should be in it." "Read the form back to me." The child checks, the child finds the missing book, the child fixes it. That's slower than looking yourself, and it's the last time you'll have to.

I'd also say that the redo is usually invisible to you and not to them. You think of it as tidying. They experience it as a verdict. If you must fix something, do it later, out of sight, and ask yourself while you're doing it whether it needed doing. Most of the time the answer is that it didn't, and you're fixing it for the same reason the hand went out in the first place, which is that a thing done badly is hard to leave alone.

"They've got enough on with school"

Leo has spelling, reading, a project on the Romans, and football on Tuesday. It seems unkind to add the bag and the bed to that. School is his work and the house is yours, and the division is tidy and it's the wrong one.

The reason it's the wrong one is that the two aren't in competition, or not in the way the belief assumes. Elizabeth White, Mark DeBoer and Rebecca Scharf used a national study of nearly ten thousand American children who started kindergarten in 2010, whose parents reported at the time how often the child did chores. Three years later, in third grade, the children rated their own competence at school, with friends, in getting on with others, and in their satisfaction with life, and sat reading, maths and science assessments. Children who'd done chores regularly at five rated themselves more competent at eight on every measure, after allowing for sex, family income and parents' education. Children who'd rarely done chores had higher odds of being in the bottom fifth on each self-rating, by around a fifth to a quarter, and those are modest odds. Chores of any frequency were also associated with slightly better maths scores. It's an association from parent and child reports and it can't show that the chores caused anything. The households where five-year-olds do chores may differ in a hundred other ways. But the direction is the opposite of the belief. The children with the jobs were not the ones falling behind.

I'd read it the way I've read everything else in this book, which is that the job is the practice. A child who's packed a bag and made a sandwich has practised holding a small plan in their head and finishing it, and that's not a different skill from the one spelling asks for. It's the same one, in a kitchen.

There's also a quieter point about what "enough on" measures. Leo's day has school in it and football and a screen. The bag takes four minutes. The bed takes two. The sandwich takes six. If those twelve minutes are what breaks him, it isn't the minutes, and a childhood with no jobs in it isn't a lighter childhood. It's one where the whole of the work is somebody else's and the child's part is to be transported between it.

None of this argues for a chore chart on the fridge with stickers, and I'd not give you one. It argues for the small jobs that are already the child's by any sensible measure, their bag, their bed, their plate, being theirs in practice and not just in name. School will be fine. School is where they're already allowed to do things badly. It's the house where they're not.

"What will people think"

This one doesn't get said out loud, so I'll say it. Ava will turn up with her shoes on the wrong feet and her hair done by Ava. Leo's lunch box will have a sandwich in it that's clearly been made by a nine-year-old, and another parent will see it. The bad version is on show, and it's on show as a fact about you.

I'd ask two things. The first is whose standard is being defended. It isn't Ava's. Ava is delighted with her hair. It isn't the school's, which sees forty children a morning and has seen worse. It's the standard of an imagined observer, who exists mostly in your head and who, if they exist at all, is also standing at a school gate with a child and their own morning behind them. I'd only add that the school gate is the most forgiving audience you'll ever have, because everyone there is losing. The imagined observer has a book of their own in this series, *Everyone was looking at their own shoes*, and it says the same thing about every room.

The second is what the alternative shows. A child whose every visible thing was done by an adult is also on show. It's just that what's on show is the adult. I'd rather people saw the sandwich.

There's a practical answer, too, which is that the showing is temporary. The hair done by Ava is bad for a month and then it's fine. The sandwich is a mess for a fortnight. If the standard of other people's eyes is the thing that's stopping you, then start with the jobs nobody sees, the bed, the plate, the bag, and let the visible

ones follow once the go has got good enough. That's a compromise, and I'd make it, because a parent who starts is better than one who doesn't.

"Other parents do it all"

They do, mostly. The takeover isn't your quirk. It's the water, and it's worth seeing that, because a habit that everybody has doesn't feel like a habit. It feels like parenting.

The time-use research from chapter 3 is the evidence. Across eleven countries over nearly fifty years, parents' time on childcare went up, and it went up most among the parents with the most education. Brendan Churchill and colleagues, looking at American time-use data from 2003 to 2018, found that mothers and fathers of every generation were spending more time in the direct care of children as the years went on, and that it wasn't a matter of one generation of parents being different from the last. It was happening to all of them at once. That's a period effect, in their language, and it means the thing pushing parents towards more doing is in the air rather than in you.

I don't know why, and the researchers offer several ideas that I won't pretend to adjudicate. What I'd say is that the direction of the pressure is towards more, and that the takeover is what more looks like in a hall at quarter to eight. It isn't a failure of yours. It's the thing the culture is currently calling good parenting, and it will be called something else in thirty years, the way most parenting fashions are.

But "everyone does it" is a description and not a permission. The chores study in chapter 13 found children of the same period, in the same country, whose parents didn't do it all, and those children were doing fine. The choice exists inside the water. It's just that

nobody around you is making it visible, and if you make it, you'll look for a while like the parent who's doing less. You'll be doing less. The child will be doing more, and the total will be about the same.

I'd also say that the other parents aren't a jury. They're in the same hall with the same hand, and half of them are reading a version of this book. The ones who look like they've got it sorted are the ones whose children are at the stage where the takeover still works, which is every stage until it doesn't.

"I do it because I love them"

Yes. I've left this one until last among the beliefs because it's the truest and the hardest to argue with, and I don't want to argue with it. I want to ask what love wants.

Love wants Ava to have her shoes on and be warm. It also wants Ava at eighteen to be a person who can do things, who sits down in front of a form and fills it in, who moves into a flat and knows how a washing machine works, who has had ten thousand small experiences of trying something, doing it badly, and doing it again. Both are love. The takeover serves the first and starves the second, and it's easy not to notice because the first is standing in the hall in front of you and the second is fourteen years away.

There's a body of research on what the second looks like when it goes wrong, under the name helicopter parenting, which is the researchers' phrase and not mine. Terri LeMoyne and Tom Buchanan surveyed three hundred and seventeen students at an American university about how involved their parents had been and were, and found that more involvement of that kind went with lower psychological wellbeing and higher use of medication for anxiety and depression. Julia Vigdal and Kolbjørn Brønnick reviewed thirty-eight studies of the same question in 2022 and found that most reported a link between this style of parenting and symptoms of anxiety and depression, and then said, carefully, that the studies had problems which undermined the finding. Most are surveys of students at one moment, most rely on the young person's memory of their parents, and none can show that the parenting caused the symptoms rather than the other way round

or a third thing causing both. I'd take that caution seriously. What I'd take from the research is only this. Nobody has found that the young adults whose parents did everything are doing better.

I'd put the argument in plainer terms than the research can. A child who has never been allowed to do a thing badly arrives at eighteen with no evidence that they can do things. They may have been told they can. They haven't seen it. And the parent who loves them is the one who, out of love, removed the evidence one shoe at a time.

So the belief is right. You do it because you love them. The question this book asks is whether the love could take a different form on Tuesday, which is standing a bit further back. It's a less visible love and it's harder to do. It's also the kind they'll still have when you're not in the hall.

What the takeover costs you

So far I've talked about what it costs the child. I'd like to spend a chapter on what it costs you, because I think you've been under-counting, and the under-count is part of why the habit survives.

The obvious cost is the minutes, and you've got a number for that from chapter 1. Multiply it by the days in a school year and then by the years until the child would have learned the thing anyway, and you've got a rough figure for what the quick version has cost you so far. It won't be small. The takeover is cheap on any one morning and it's a large purchase over a childhood, and the reason nobody sees the total is that it's paid in twenty-second instalments.

The less obvious cost is what it does to quarter to eight. A morning in which you do the shoes, the bag, the sandwich and the form is a morning in which you're doing four people's jobs and being thanked for none of them, because nobody thanks you for a thing they didn't know was theirs. The resentment that arrives around the third job isn't a character flaw. It's the correct response to doing other people's work. And it lands, usually, on the child, in the voice from chapter 7, and the child has no idea what they've done, because from where they're standing they've done nothing. That's the point. They've been arranged so that they do nothing, and then they're resented for it.

There's a third cost, and it's the one I'd want you to sit with. A parent who does everything is needed all the time. That can feel like the point of the job, and there's a real pleasure in being the person the child turns to. But being needed for the shoes at seven,

and the phone call at fourteen, and the form at nineteen, is a full-time post with no promotion, and the parent holding it has, without meaning to, made themselves unable to leave the hall. Every job kept is a job you'll be doing next year. The takeover doesn't just cost you the minutes. It costs you the version of family life where the children carry some of it.

I'd say that plainly. You're tired at quarter to eight because the household has one working member and three passengers, and the passengers are able-bodied. The method in the next chapters is slower for a fortnight and it's the only thing in this book that gives you time back. It gives it back by giving the jobs back.

What it does to them

I've been careful in this book not to say that the takeover damages children, because the research doesn't say it, and because most children of parents who do everything turn out to be adults who can do things, having learned them later and elsewhere. So I want to be exact about what I think it does.

Bandura, whose work on self-efficacy underlies a lot of what I've cited, used that term for a person's belief that they can do a thing, and argued that the strongest source of it is having done the thing. Not being told you can. Not watching someone else do it. Doing it, badly, and then less badly. If that's right, and it's held up for fifty years, then a child who's never done the zip has no belief about the zip, and a child who's done nothing has a general absence where a sense of being able to do things would be. That absence doesn't show up at four. It shows up at fourteen, when the jobs get bigger and the child meets one without a parent's hand and has no record to draw on.

The research on parents and adolescents gives a supporting picture. Marie Yap and colleagues reviewed a hundred and eighty-one studies of what parents do and whether their twelve-to-eighteen-year-olds had depression or anxiety, and found that over-involvement, and giving the young person less room to run their own life, were among the factors with the soundest evidence of a link, alongside less warmth and more conflict. In early childhood, the picture is weaker. Eline Möller and colleagues pooled studies of children under five and found the links between over-controlling

or over-protective parenting and early anxiety were small. I'd read those two together as saying that the cost isn't at four and it grows, which is what you'd expect if what's being lost is practice.

There's also what the hand says. Every takeover carries a message, whether or not you mean it, and the message is "you can't". A child who receives it twenty times a morning, kindly, for years, will believe it, because it's the most consistent thing anyone tells them. It's a bit like a spectator who runs onto the pitch every time a player looks like fumbling the ball. The player is never allowed to find out what they'd have done.

What it does to them, then, isn't a wound. It's a gap in the record, and the record is what they'll consult at eighteen when they're wondering whether they can. You can't fill it retrospectively. You can stop widening it on Tuesday.

Pick the one job and say what done looks like

The method begins here, and it's small on purpose. You're not reorganising the household. You're handing over one job, properly, and then another.

Pick the one job. Choose a task the child could do badly now. Not one they can do well, and not one they can't do at all. For a four-year-old, shoes, coat, cereal. For a nine-year-old, the bag, the bed, a sandwich. For a fourteen-year-old, the form, the phone call, their own washing. One. The habit lives in dozens of jobs and you'll get to them, but the first one is a practice for you as much as for them, and you'll want the attention.

Say what done looks like for their age. Before you hand it over, decide what a finished version looks like from a child that age, and decide it at their height, not yours. Shoes done means shoes on and fastened, not on the right feet. Bag done means the three things in it, not the three things neatly. Form done means every box has something in it, not every box right. Write it down if that helps, and hold yourself to it, because your standard will drift upward the moment you see the first go. This is the other side of the earlier book *They're nine, not lazy*, which is about expecting adult results from a child. Expecting nothing and expecting everything are both ways of not looking, and the cure for both is to decide, in advance, what a reasonable job from this child is.

Say it out loud, once. "From tomorrow, the bag's yours. Done means the reading book, the water bottle and the lunch. I'll ask you at the door if it's in." That's the whole announcement. Don't make it

a speech, and don't make it a punishment, and don't pair it with a grievance about how long you've been doing it. It's a job being given to the person it belongs to. Children take that better than adults expect, especially if it comes with the plain fact that it's theirs now and nobody's going to redo it.

Then don't touch it. The rest of the method is about that, and it's the hard part.

If you're choosing between jobs, I'd choose the one that annoys you most. The one that produces the sigh at quarter to eight. That's the one where the minutes and the resentment are, and it's the one where giving it back changes your morning the most. It's also, not by coincidence, the one you've most been telling yourself they can't do.

Sit on your hands

You've handed over the bag. It's the next morning and Leo is on the landing looking at it, and you're standing there with your keys, and the hand is moving. This chapter is about the next four minutes.

Stand somewhere else. The takeover needs you within reach. If you're in the kitchen with the kettle on, you can't do the bag, and neither can the hand. Be near enough to hear and far enough not to help. For a four-year-old with shoes, that's sitting on the stairs with your hands in your lap. For a fourteen-year-old with a form, it's the next room.

Say less than you want to. The commentary is a takeover with words. "No, the other loop." "You've forgotten the bottle." "Is that how you spell it?" Each of those moves the job back to you, because now the child is following your voice rather than their own plan. The things worth saying are short and few. "That's the hard bit." "Take your time." "Check it against the list." If they're stuck and haven't asked, wait. Stuck is where the working out happens, and it looks like nothing.

When they ask, give the least help. Chapter 8's rule. Hold the shoe. Point at the pile. Say the doctor's name. Then take your hand away and let them finish. If you find you've done the whole strap, that's a takeover, and the answer is to notice it and to hand the next strap back, not to undo the first.

Praise the go, not the result. When the bag's packed, badly, say that it's packed. Don't say it's brilliant, because it isn't and they know. Don't say what's wrong with it, because that's the redo. "You did your bag" is enough, and it's more than they've been getting, which is nothing, because until today the bag wasn't theirs to be praised for. There's a whole book to be written about what to praise in children, and it isn't this one, but the short version is that a child praised for the attempt attempts again.

Don't watch the clock out loud. If the margin's there, and chapter 21 is about making sure it is, then the four minutes aren't a crisis and shouldn't sound like one. "Hurry up" is the hand in a different form.

I'd expect the first morning to take three times as long and the child to be worse at it than you'd feared. That's normal and it's the price, and it's paid once. By the second week the bag takes Leo two minutes and you haven't thought about it, and that's the moment to notice that you've had two minutes and a job back, and to look for the next one.

Build the margin

The reason the method fails, when it fails, is the clock. You handed over the shoes on Monday, and on Thursday you were late, and the hand went out because the alternative was a missed bus. So the margin has to be built before the job is handed over, and it's easier than the morning makes it look.

Start at the weekend. Hand the job over on a Saturday, when there's no bus. The child gets two goes at it with nothing riding on the time, and you get two goes at watching without the clock in your chest. By Monday it's the third time and it's shorter.

Move the morning by ten minutes. The slow version of one job needs about ten more minutes than the quick version, for a fortnight, and after that it needs none. Ten minutes is one alarm. If you're thinking that ten minutes is exactly what you haven't got, I'd point at chapter 17, which is about where your minutes went. They went on the jobs. This is how you get them back, and the first fortnight is the investment.

Do the slow bit the night before. Shoes by the door, bag by the bed, the form on the table with a pen. A child doing a job for the first time is slowed most by looking for things. If the things are where the job is, the job is the job and not a search. The earlier book in this series about small admin has a version of this for adults, and it's the same trick.

Keep the standing job standing. Once a job is the child's, it's theirs every day, not on the days when there's time. The habit gets back in on the tight mornings, and one tight morning becomes the rule if you let it. If a morning genuinely can't take the slow version, chapter 24 has a way to do the takeover without taking the job back, but that should be rare, and it should feel like an exception.

Expect the fortnight. Every job handed over costs about two weeks of margin and then stops costing. If you know that going in, the second Tuesday, when it's still slow and you're still standing on the stairs, is the middle of a known thing and not evidence that it isn't working. It's working. It's just that working looks like this.

I'd add one thing. The margin isn't only minutes. It's the state you're in. A parent with nothing left at quarter to eight will take over whatever the plan says, because the hand is faster than the plan. If the mornings are the problem, hand over the evening jobs first, the plate, the bed, the bath toys, where the clock's kinder, and let the mornings follow once you've both had some practice.

The decision

You've read the argument. Here's the decision, in one sentence, and then how to hold it.

The rule is this. If they can do it badly, they do it. Not if they can do it well, and not if there's time, and not if you're in the mood to watch. If a child that age could produce a bad version, the bad version is theirs to produce, and your job is the least help and the margin.

Three things to decide now, while you're not in the hall.

Which job. Chapter 19. One, the annoying one, with "done" written down at their height.

What you'll do when the hand moves. It will move. It's had years of practice and it's faster than you. So decide in advance what you'll do instead, in the form "when this happens, I'll do that". Research on plans of that shape, which Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed across nearly a hundred studies, finds that stating the situation and the response together makes the response much more likely to happen than a general intention does, because the situation itself then cues the action. So. When I see the strap going through the wrong loop, I'll put my hands in my pockets. When I hear "can you just do it", I'll say "what's the first bit you're stuck on". When I'm about to redo the bed, I'll leave the room. Write yours down. They should be about your hands and your mouth, because those are what the takeover uses.

What you'll say when it's done. "You did your bag." Decide the sentence, because in the moment you'll want to say something about the sandwich.

What to expect. The first week is slow and the second week is less slow. Somewhere in the third or fourth, you'll notice the job happening without you, and that's the point at which to add the next one. Phillippa Lally and colleagues, following ninety-six volunteers building a daily habit, found that it took weeks to months for a new behaviour to become automatic, that the range was wide, and that missing a day didn't materially set it back. That was adults building their own habits and I'm stretching it to a child building one with you watching, so treat it as a shape and not a schedule. The shape is that it gets easier, unevenly, and that a bad day doesn't reset it.

And what to expect from yourself. You'll take over. Probably on Thursday. Chapter 25 is about that, and the short version is that it's a takeover and not a verdict, and the job is still theirs on Friday.

Give it back and leave it given

The job's been theirs for a fortnight and it's roughly working. This chapter is about the two things that happen next, which are adding another job and not taking the first one back.

Add the next one when the first one's boring. Not when it's perfect. When the bag is being packed without you thinking about it, and without them making a thing of it, that's the moment. Pick the next annoying job and do chapter 19 again. It'll be faster, because you've both done this before and the child knows what "it's yours now" means. Over a school year that's perhaps a dozen jobs, and a dozen jobs is a different childhood.

Don't take it back on a bad morning. This is where most handed-over jobs go, and they go quietly. There's a tight Thursday and you do the bag, and on Friday you do it because you did it on Thursday, and by the next week it's yours again and nobody announced it. If you have to do the takeover on a tight morning, say so. "I'm doing your bag today because we're late. It's still yours tomorrow." The saying is what stops the job sliding back. Without it, the child correctly concludes that the job is theirs when convenient, which is the same as not theirs.

Don't take it back when they do it badly. They'll do it badly. That was the deal in the title. A week in, the bag will have the wrong book in it and you'll get a note from school, and the note will feel like a verdict on the method. It isn't. It's a nine-year-old learning what happens when the wrong book goes in, which is a note, and

the note is a better teacher than you are because it doesn't love him. Let it land. Then ask him what he'll do about it. Don't put the right book in.

Don't take it back when they ask you to. "Can you just do it" will come, especially in the first week, and especially from the older ones, who've had the longest to learn that asking works. The answer is the one from chapter 22. "What's the first bit you're stuck on." It's kinder than it sounds, because it's an offer of the least help, and it's firmer than it sounds, because it doesn't move the job.

Notice what you've got back. This is the bit parents skip and I'd not skip it. After a term of this, the morning has fewer jobs in it for you. Count them, the way you counted the takeovers in chapter 1. The number will have moved, and the minutes will have moved with it, and quarter to eight will have less of the sigh in it. That's the return on the fortnight. It's also, I'd say, the sight of a household with more than one working member in it, which is what a household with children in it is supposed to become.

Toddlers, teenagers, the child who finds it harder, the other parent, and the morning that can't be slow

Most of the book assumes a child somewhere between four and fourteen and a parent with a bit of room. Here are the cases where that's not quite you.

Toddlers. Under about three, most of the jobs in this book aren't theirs yet and the method is smaller. It's the spoon. It's letting them push the arm into the sleeve you're holding. It's the NHS advice from chapter 4, which is to wait until they seem ready, try, and if it doesn't work, leave it a few weeks. The wanting arrives early and the thing to do with it is to let it have the spoon, not to hand over the shoes.

Teenagers. At fourteen the jobs are bigger, the phone call, the form, the washing, the appointment, and the habit has had longer to teach both of you. The method's the same and the announcement matters more, because a teenager handed a job without warning hears a punishment. Say it's theirs, say what done looks like, and then be somewhere else, because a teenager watched is a teenager who stops. Expect more objection and a shorter fortnight, since they learn fast when they've decided to. And expect the older habits, the "can you just", to be the ones that need the chapter 22 sentence most.

The child who finds it harder. Some children find most tasks harder than others their age, and it isn't one task but the pattern. The NHS page on ADHD in children describes trouble following

instructions and forgetting everyday tasks like brushing teeth or putting on socks, and it's careful to say that many children are like that at times, especially under five, without it meaning anything. The NHS page on the signs of autism describes differences in communication, play and response to change, and says that every autistic child is different. If your child's pattern is more than age, the first person to talk to is their teacher, who can involve the school's special educational needs coordinator, and the GP if you're still concerned. For those children the method still applies. It applies with smaller steps, more of the least help, a longer fortnight, and a "done" that's set for that child rather than for a chart. Nothing in this book means expecting a child to manage what their condition makes very hard. It means not doing the parts they could do, which are usually more than the takeover has been allowing.

The other parent. If one of you hands the bag over and the other packs it, the bag isn't handed over. The NHS advice on everyday skills is that a child learns more easily when everyone who looks after them takes a similar line, and that's this. Agree the one job together, and agree the "done", and agree the sentence for the tight morning. If you can't agree, start with a job that's only in your half of the week.

The morning that can't be slow. There'll be one. The bus, the hospital appointment, the day you overslept. Do the takeover, and say the sentence from chapter 23. "I'm doing this because we're late, and it's yours tomorrow." That's the whole of it. A takeover with the sentence attached is an exception. A takeover without it is the habit.

The job that's not safe. The hob, the road, the medicine cupboard, the bath for a small child, the front door. These stay with you, and no argument in this book moves them. What can move is the part next to them. The child can get the pan out and you can put it on the heat. They can hold your hand across the road and choose when to cross. The least help works at the edge of a job you're keeping, too.

When you did it for them again

It's Thursday, you were late, and you did the shoes. Or it's three weeks in, and you look up one morning and realise you've been packing the bag again for a week and didn't notice starting. This chapter is about that, because it will happen, and what you do with it decides whether the job's gone.

The first thing to say is that one takeover isn't the habit back. Lally's volunteers, from chapter 22, missed days and carried on, and the missed day didn't materially cost them. A child whose bag was theirs for a fortnight and yours for a morning still has a fortnight of bag-packing in the record, and the record is what this book is about. What matters is the next morning, not the last one.

The second thing is to say it. "I did your bag yesterday. It's yours today." Out loud, plainly, without an apology, which would make it into an event, and without a lecture, which would make it into a fault. The habit gets back in silently. It goes out again when somebody names it.

The third is to ask which belief did it. Every takeover has one behind it, and it'll usually be one of the chapters in the middle of this book. Was it "quicker", because you'd lost the margin? Then the fix is chapter 21, and probably ten minutes. Was it "I can't stand watching", because the strap was going through the wrong loop again? Then the fix is where you stand. Was it "they'll do it wrong", because the note came from school and it stung? Then the fix is

chapter 23, and letting the note teach. The takeover isn't random. It's an argument you lost, and losing it once tells you which argument to have with yourself before tomorrow.

The fourth is not to take the week back. If you've been doing the bag for a week, don't decide that the method didn't work and that Leo's not ready. Decide that the job slid, which jobs do, and hand it over again, with the announcement, on a Saturday. The second handover is shorter than the first because he's done it before. The fortnight is more like a weekend.

And don't add it to a list of things you've failed at as a parent. The takeover is the most ordinary thing in the book and it's the thing every parent reading it does, and the difference between the ones whose children end up doing things and the ones whose children don't isn't that one group never took over. It's that they noticed, and said so, and handed it back.

The shoes, again

It's quarter to eight, a term on. Ava is on the bottom stair with a shoe in each hand, and they're the right way round, because she worked out about a month ago that the buckles go on the outside, and she did that without you. You're in the kitchen with your coat on. You can hear the strap, and the strap taking three goes, and then the other strap. It takes four minutes. You've used them to find your keys.

Leo's bag went past you on the way down the stairs and you didn't look in it, because it's his, and the last note from school was in October. Maya filled in the form on Sunday and asked you the doctor's name and nothing else. You've stopped counting the takeovers, because the number stopped being interesting, and the mornings have a different sound to them, which is mostly other people doing things.

None of it is done well. The bag is a mess and the form has the postcode in the wrong box and Ava's shoes are on the right feet by a method she'd struggle to explain. That's the bad version, and it's the one they can do, and next year's version will be better because this one was allowed.

One action. Tomorrow, when the hand moves, and it will, put it in your pocket, and say the shortest true thing, which is "that's yours". Then wait. That's the whole method, and the rest of the book was the argument for it.

Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't medical or psychological advice. If you're concerned about your child's development, their teacher, the school's special educational needs coordinator and a GP are the people to ask. The examples throughout, Ava and her shoes, Leo and his bag, Maya and the form, the cereal on the floor and the note from school, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people. The timings and the "fortnight" are my estimates and not findings.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026 by reading their published abstracts. None was read in full, and none carried a retraction or correction notice at that date. Where a paper is cross-sectional, it describes an association at one point in time and can't show what causes what, and I've tried to say so each time. Several of the studies are small, and I've given the numbers so you can weigh them.

Chapter 1. No sources. The terms are the book's own.

Chapter 2. No sources. The earlier book referred to is *They're nine, not lazy*.

Chapter 3. Dotti Sani and Treas, "Educational Gradients in Parents' Child-Care Time Across Countries, 1965-2012", *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78, 2016, pages 1083 to 1096. Time-use data for eleven

Western countries. The abstract gives the direction and not the size of the increase, and I've printed no figure. The stabilisers comparison and the claim about attention are mine.

Chapter 4. Geppert and Küster, "The Emergence of 'Wanting to Do It Oneself': A Precursor of Achievement Motivation", *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 6, 1983, pages 355 to 369. Forty-one children, described by the authors as a pilot study. Warneken and Tomasello, "Altruistic helping in human infants and young chimpanzees", *Science* 311, 2006, pages 1301 to 1303. Children of eighteen months in laboratory tasks. The NHS page "Teaching your child everyday skills", at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), last reviewed 9 March 2026, read on 26 September 2026. The claim about what the overruled child learns is mine.

Chapter 5. No research sources. The six days and four days are illustrative guesses and are said to be.

Chapter 6. Obradović, Sulik and Shaffer, "Learning to let go: Parental over-engagement predicts poorer self-regulation in kindergartners", *Journal of Family Psychology* 35, 2021, pages 1160 to 1170. A hundred and two parent and child pairs in the United States. The measure the authors call over-engagement was active guiding during times the child was actively on task, and it predicted lower scores on the children's hot executive function tasks and observed self-regulation after adjusting for age, parent education, family income and global parenting ratings. The reading of the discomfort as a signal is mine.

Chapter 7. Hokoda and Fincham, "Origins of children's helpless and mastery achievement patterns in the family", *Journal of Educational Psychology* 87, 1995, pages 375 to 385. Twenty-one third-grade children, ten helpless and eleven mastery-oriented, with their mothers. The authors say the results should be interpreted with caution because of the small sample. The earlier book referred to is Not in front of the children.

Chapter 8. Bradshaw, Duineveld, Conigrave, Steward, Ferber, Joussemet, Parker and Ryan, "Disentangling autonomy-supportive and psychologically controlling parenting: A meta-analysis of self-determination theory's dual process model across cultures", *American Psychologist* 80, 2025, pages 879 to 895. Two hundred and thirty-eight studies and 126,423 participants. Autonomy support correlated with child wellbeing at 0.30 and psychological control with ill-being at 0.26, and each held when the other was controlled for. The description of what autonomy support covers is the standard one from that literature and not from the abstract. The definition of help as keeping the child's hand on the job is mine.

Chapter 9. Segrin, Wosidlo, Givertz and Montgomery, "Parent and Child Traits Associated with Overparenting", *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 32, 2013, pages 569 to 595. Six hundred and fifty-three parent and adult child pairs from thirty-two states. Jiao, Pitts and Segrin, "Autonomy and overparenting: Are parents of emerging adults being responsive?", *Family Process* 63, 2024, pages 1623 to 1636. Two hundred and fifty-six pairs. Both are surveys and neither can show direction. The claim that the sentence updates rather than expires is mine.

Chapter 10. Bernier, Carlson and Whipple, "From external regulation to self-regulation: early parenting precursors of young children's executive functioning", *Child Development* 81, 2010, pages 326 to 339. Eighty mother and infant pairs in Canada. The claim about looking after how it looks is mine.

Chapter 11. Alcalá, Rogoff, Mejía-Arauz, Coppens and Dexter, "Children's Initiative in Contributions to Family Work in Indigenous-Heritage and Cosmopolitan Communities in Mexico", *Human Development* 57, 2014, pages 96 to 115. Mothers' reports of six-to-eight-year-olds in two communities in Guadalajara. Coppens, Alcalá, Mejía-Arauz and Rogoff, "Children's Initiative in Family Household Work in Mexico", *Human Development* 57, 2014, pages 116 to 130. Sixteen children aged nine and ten. The description of the takeover as a curriculum is mine.

Chapter 12. No research sources. The earlier book referred to is Good enough went out on time. The apprentice's joint is mine.

Chapter 13. White, DeBoer and Scharf, "Associations Between Household Chores and Childhood Self-Competency", *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 40, 2019, pages 176 to 182. 9,971 children from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten cohort of 2010 to 2011, in the United States. The odds ratios for scoring in the bottom fifth among children who rarely did chores were 1.17 for prosocial behaviour, 1.25 for academic ability, 1.24 for peer relationships and 1.27 for life satisfaction, which is what "around a fifth to a quarter" refers to. Parent-reported chores and child-reported competence. The reading of chores as practice for the same skill school asks for is mine.

Chapter 14. No research sources. The earlier book referred to is Everyone was looking at their own shoes.

Chapter 15. Dotti Sani and Treas, as above. Churchill, Kornrich and Ruppanner, "Children of the Revolution: The continued unevenness of the gender revolution in housework, childcare and work time across birth cohorts", Social Science Research 111, 2023, article 102868. American Time Use Survey, 2003 to 2018. The abstract reports a period effect for time in primary care of children across cohorts. The claim that the pressure is in the air rather than in you is my reading of that.

Chapter 16. LeMoyne and Buchanan, "Does 'Hovering' Matter? Helicopter Parenting and Its Effect on Well-Being", Sociological Spectrum 31, 2011, pages 399 to 418. Three hundred and seventeen students at one American university, cross-sectional. Vigdal and Brønnick, "A Systematic Review of 'Helicopter Parenting' and Its Relationship With Anxiety and Depression", Frontiers in Psychology 13, 2022, article 872981. Thirty-eight studies, with the authors' own warning about validity. The claim about evidence removed one shoe at a time is mine.

Chapter 17. No research sources. The costs are my observations.

Chapter 18. Bandura, "Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change", Psychological Review 84, 1977, pages 191 to 215, for the term and the claim that performance is its strongest source, which I'm taking from the paper's standard summary rather than from a full reading. Yap, Pilkington, Ryan and Jorm, "Parental factors associated with depression and anxiety in young people: a systematic review and meta-analysis", Journal of

Affective Disorders 156, 2014, pages 8 to 23. A hundred and eighty-one articles on twelve-to-eighteen-year-olds. Möller, Nikolić, Majdandžić and Bögels, "Associations between maternal and paternal parenting behaviors, anxiety and its precursors in early childhood: A meta-analysis", Clinical Psychology Review 45, 2016, pages 17 to 33. Twenty-eight studies of mothers and twelve of fathers, children under five, associations described by the authors as small. The reading of the two together, the message of the hand, and the spectator are mine.

Chapter 19. No research sources. The earlier book referred to is They're nine, not lazy.

Chapter 20. No research sources. The advice on praise is a suggestion and is labelled as one.

Chapter 21. No research sources. The earlier book referred to is It can be done today. The fortnight is an estimate.

Chapter 22. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", Advances in Experimental Social Psychology 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119, for the when-then form. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", European Journal of Social Psychology 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. Ninety-six volunteers, eighty-two with usable data. The method hasn't been tested as a package and what I say to expect is my expectation.

Chapter 23. No research sources.

Chapter 24. The NHS pages "ADHD in children and young people", "Signs of autism in children" and "Teaching your child everyday skills", at nhs.uk, read on 26 September 2026. No claim is made about the effectiveness of any service. The adjustments for children who find tasks harder are my suggestions.

Chapter 25. Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from an adult's missed day to a child's handed-back job is mine.

Looked up and not used. Schiffrin and colleagues, "Helping or Hovering? The Effects of Helicopter Parenting on College Students' Well-Being", Journal of Child and Family Studies 2014, is the paper most often cited on this subject, and its abstract wasn't available to me from any free source, so it isn't cited. Vasquez and colleagues' 2016 meta-analysis of parent autonomy support and school achievement, in Educational Psychology Review, was in the same position. Matte-Gagné and Bernier's 2011 follow-up on autonomy support and language adds a mechanism this book doesn't need. Leung and Shek's longitudinal studies of overparenting in Hong Kong adolescents, 2021 and 2024, were read and left out to keep the chapter on young adults short. Haines and Schutte's 2023 meta-analysis of parental conditional regard is about approval, not help, and isn't cited. Kidd and colleagues' 2022 meta-analysis of parental bonding and adult mood disorders is about a broader measure of overprotection and is left out for the same reason. Warneken and Tomasello's later work, and Rheingold's 1982 study of toddlers joining in adult housework, which I'd have liked to cite, couldn't be confirmed from an abstract and aren't.