

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Building Confidence by Being In Charge

LAST WEEK A FIVE-YEAR-OLD GIRL named Jourenii Johnson took a step toward her goal of becoming a teacher someday by stepping in to instruct a group of college students at Grambling State University in Louisiana. Instead of just giving a math lesson as she had planned, Jourenii found herself spending part of her time disciplining the unruly college students, getting them to remove their hats in class or put away their phones. She lectured them on problems of bullying.

Jourenii's teaching time was part of a confidence-building program for girls, and she made news by demonstrating how willing she was to take on a leadership role. Having children, both girls and boys, teach us something is a good way to boost their feelings of competence and expand their awareness. For example, being in charge of getting everyone to put their cellphones away during a family outing provides a child with a chance to see the problems of non-cooperation.

Ask a young child to make sure everyone cleans up after themselves for an hour or an older child to give the family a pep talk on getting along better. Suggesting that a child be in charge of an activity or speak on a particular subject is something we would always do with an element of fun, a way of stretching everyone's thinking. We would never want a child to feel under a strain from being temporarily in charge. Like any creative way of helping children to grow, the delight of changing roles occasionally takes some flexibility and thought.

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