

ASK P&C

MY 4-YEAR-OLD SON, *Brexton*, is normally a very independent child. Yet he has recently decided that he “can’t” do tasks he’s been able to do for a long time, like putting on his socks and washing his hands. Trying to work it out often leads to a tantrum. How do I assure him that he’s just as capable now as he ever was of doing these tasks?

—Ann Marie, Johnson City, NY

IT’S frustrating for your child to “forget” skills he’s mastered. Large changes in routine or family structure often lead to a regression like this. Before you engage in another power struggle, ask yourself what other events are happening in Brexton’s life—school ending; parent returning to work; new baby; family illness, etc. He may also be unsure he’s ready for the “losses” that come with being a big boy or may temporarily need to assert additional control by deciding what he will and won’t do.

Although it may sound contrary, the fastest way to help him “remember” his capabilities is to baby him. When the pressure to grow up is lifted, the desire to grow up will return,



Have a question you'd like P&C to answer? E-mail it to AskPC@scholastic.com.

Developmental psychology expert Michelle Anthony answers your questions about your child's social, emotional, and behavioral development at home and in school. THIS MONTH: baby-like behavior, shyness, and refusing to do homework alone.



albeit slowly. So put his socks on or wash his hands, being sure to say you’re excited for him to do it on his own. Then lament the other things little boys (including him) *cannot* do: eat candy, go to the big boy park, etc. Be his teammate rooting for him to get big enough to be “ready” for these privileges that go hand-in-hand with the responsibilities of growing up.

MY 5-YEAR-OLD *is always silent around his friends. I'm concerned he won't grow*

out of it. Should I talk to him about his shyness and, if so, how?

—Charles R., Kingsport, TN

TEMPERAMENT differences often persist into adulthood. However, there is a lot you can do to help your child build confidence and venture out of his shell, without having to talk to him at all!

Make one-on-one play dates. Think about kids whose pace is well matched to his. In larger groups or

with loud playmates, shy children can feel overwhelmed and their contributions can be overlooked.

Provide opportunities for your child to become more comfortable speaking up. He might order his own food at restaurants or ask a sales clerk to help locate an item.

Find activities that boost confidence and self-esteem like karate or theater.

Think of places/ways he can be a leader: He

might take the dog for a walk or show his little sister how to do a difficult task like tying her shoes.

The goal is to celebrate the way he is while allowing him to better speak his mind and be recognized.

WHEN MY SON *started getting homework in first grade, I—like the other parents of kids in his class—had to help him. He's now in fifth grade and freaks out when I tell him he needs to do homework on his own, because he's come to see it as a joint project. How can I handle this?*

—Ellen C., Pelham, NY

IT SEEMS there are two issues: too much homework and a lack of skills to independently accomplish it. Your son may be panicking at going from total support to none. Ask for clarification on the school’s homework policy and work with his teacher to slowly increase your child’s independence. For example, ask her to help him list his assignments in a notebook where he can break down projects into manageable pieces. At home, he can work in a step-by-step manner. This way, you, your child, and his teacher are all on the same team, working together to build academic skills and increased independence. **P&C**

Michelle Anthony, M.A., Ph.D., is an expert in developmental psychology, a certified K-3 teacher, and co-founder of Wide-Eyed Learning, a company helping parents and kids connect.