

THE DANGERS OF INFANTALIZATION

Infantilization can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Assuming a person cannot be independent and make their own choices. How will an autistic individual ever gain independence when others do everything for them and call all the shots for them? Infantilization can also erase their voice. Adults with disabilities may find themselves ignored or dismissed, based on the assumption that they do not understand the situation at hand.

Infantilization Behaviors

- **Babying children/adults** – assuming that the individual cannot do the things that they are developmentally capable of and stifling their ability to try
- **Being judgmental and disapproving** – expressing severe negative reactions to a person's desire to branch out and have their own unique ideas or skills
- **Rejecting or interfering in moves for independence** – thwarting an individual's ability to grow by disallowing them to do (age-appropriate) things
- **Changing speech patterns** – using baby talk, dumbing-down vocabulary, speaking slower, speaking louder, and speaking in a higher pitch
- **Using pet names** – sweetie, honey, etc., as in the context of an acquaintance, rather than a familial or parental relationship
- **Speaking for a person or not speaking directly to them** – directing comments away to a parent or caregiver when the person can speak for themselves
- **Making a decision on behalf of a person who is capable of making their own** – disregarding their opinion on a certain matter
- **Being overly protective** - withholding information from a person who is old enough to handle it (e.g., not giving the sex talk) or forbidding an age-appropriate activity

What to do Instead?

- **Spotlight the problem and not the solution.** Help your child brainstorm, but do not solve the problem for them. When we shift from the problem (the product) to the process, it empowers our children to make their own decisions, figure out what is working, and what is not working, and figure out how to get through it by themselves. But, we have to show them (presume competence) that we actually believe they can do that.
- **Look at your child's toolbox for weaknesses and help them address their vulnerabilities.** Focus on what areas need work. How are they with problem-solving, flexibility, teamwork, relationship building, analysis and appraisal, perspective, self-awareness, ongoing growth and development, uncertainty management, creativity, and innovation?
- **Help your child build a library of personal knowledge (Dynamic Intelligence) that they can retrieve independently as needed.** This library is ushered in through everyday life activities that you, the parent guide, participate in with your child. You do not do the work for your child, nor do you fear or think that they cannot succeed at it. Your child develops emotional referencing, social coordination, declarative language, flexible thinking, relationship information processing, and foresight and hindsight.