

The Satter Division of Responsibility in Activity

Children are born loving their bodies, curious about them, and inclined to be active. Good parenting with activity preserves those qualities. Parenting with activity demands a division of responsibility. Parents provide *structure*, *safety* and *opportunities*. Children determine *how much* and *whether* to move and the manner of moving.

The Satter Division of Responsibility in Activity for infants:

- The parent is responsible for *safe opportunities*.
- The child is responsible for *moving*.

The parent provides the infant with a variety of positions, clothing, sights, and sounds. Then the parent remains present and lets the infant enjoy moving.

The Satter Division of Responsibility in Activity for toddlers through adolescents:

- The parent is responsible for *structure*, *safety*, and *opportunities*.
- The child is responsible for *how*, *how much*, and *whether* they move.

Supporting activity is good parenting. Parents' jobs include:

- Develop judgment about normal commotion.
- Provide safe places for activity the child enjoys.
- Find fun and rewarding family activities.
- Provide opportunities to experiment with group activities such as sports.
- Set limits on TV but not on reading, writing, artwork, other sedentary activities.
- Remove the TV and computer from the child's room.
- Make children responsible for dealing with their own boredom.

Fundamental to parents' jobs is trusting children to determine *how much* to move, the *way* to move, and *whether* to be active.

- Children will be active.
- Each child is more or less active depending on their constitutional endowment.
- Each child is more or less skilled, graceful, energetic, or aggressive depending on their constitutional endowment.
- Children's physical capabilities will grow and develop.
- They will experiment with activities that are in concert with their growth and development.
- They will experiment and find activities that are right for them.

Crossing the lines of the Satter Division of Responsibility in Activity is likely to create problems with movement and distort growth. Trying to control *whether*, *how much*, or the *way* a child moves or how their body turns out crosses the lines. So does catering to a child's expectation that they will be endlessly entertained. For a further discussion of the Satter Division of Responsibility in Activity, see "Parent in the best way: Physical activity" in *Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming*.