Encouraging kids to stand on their own

By Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish

Most books on childrearing tell us that one of our most important goals as parents is to help our kids separate from us and become independent individuals who will one day be able to function on their own without us.

But how do we do this? How do we help kids see themselves as separate, responsible, competent people? Basically, by encouraging them to do things for themselves, by allowing them to wrestle with their own problems and learn from their own mistakes. In fact, when we listen to children’s feelings, share our own feelings with them and invite them to problem-solve with us, we also promote their self-reliance.

Opportunities to encourage autonomy present themselves every day. Here are some specific skills that can help children to become more independent.

Let your child make choices. It may seem inconsequential to ask whether he wants a half-glass of milk or a whole, his toast light or dark. But to the child each small choice represents one more opportunity to exert some control over his or her life.

Try offering choices about how something is to be done. For example: “I can see you don’t like this medicine. Would it be easier for you to take it with some apple juice or ginger ale?” or “The drumming really bothers me. You can stop drumming and stay here. You can drum in your own room. You decide.”

Another alternative is to let kids come up with their own choices. A dad told his five year old: “Abby, when we cross the street, you can hold my hand or Mom’s. Or do you have an idea that’s safe?” “Can I hold the carriage?” Abby asked. That choice worked for her parents.

Show respect for a child’s struggle. We used to think that telling a child something was “easy” would be encouraging. We realize now that if children succeed in doing something “easy,” they may feel as if they haven’t accomplished much. And if they fail, they have failed to do something simple.

If, on the other hand, we say “it’s not so easy” or “this can be hard,” children give themselves another set of messages. If they succeed, they can experience the
On their own...
Continued from page 1...

pride of having done something difficult. If not, they can at least have the satisfaction of knowing the task was difficult. Just avoid saying something “must be really hard for you.” Your child may wonder, “Why me? Why not anyone else?”

Many parents find it difficult to watch a child struggle without offering help. Try giving useful information instead. “Sometimes it works if you push the end of the zipper all the way down first,” for example. Or “It might help to roll the clay into a soft ball before you try to make something.”

This doesn’t mean we should never do things for our kids that they can do themselves. As parents, we can sense when a child is tired or in need of some comfort or special attention.

▲ Don’t ask too many questions.
The classic—“Where did you go?” “Out.” “What did you do?” “Nothing”— didn’t come from nowhere. Other tactics kids use to fend off questions they aren’t ready or willing to answer are “I dunno” and “Leave me alone.”

Try saying, “Welcome home. Glad to see you.” When parents stop bombarding children with questions and listen with interest when they talk, kids often begin to open up. Does this mean you need it. We search for an immediate, appropriate answer. But, often, when kids ask a question, they’ve already done some thinking about the answer. What they need most is an adult who will act as a sounding board to help them explore their thoughts further. There’s always time to supply the “correct” answer later, if it seems important.

Giving children a quick answer is no favor, especially if we’re doing the mental exercise for them. It’s more helpful to turn a question back to them for further examination. There’s no rush. The process of searching for an answer is as valuable as the answer itself.

We could repeat the question: “When you’re ready, you’ll get into the water.” “One of these days, you’ll use the bathroom just like Mommy.”

▲ Encourage kids to use sources outside the home. One way to lessen children’s feelings of dependency is to direct them outward to a larger community that has valuable resources waiting to be tapped. The world is not an alien place. There’s help to be had when you need it.

More ways to nurture kids’ independence

Let children “own” their own bodies. Refrain from constantly brushing the hair out of her eyes or fixing his collar. Kids experience this kind of fussing over them as an invasion of their physical privacy.

Stay out of the minutiae of their lives. Few kids appreciate hearing, “Sit up when you do your homework.” or “Button your cuffs. They look so sloppy.” Translate the “Ma-ah” or “Da-ed” response: “Quit bugging me. Get off my back.”

Watch what you say about kids in front of them. Picture yourself standing next to your mother as she tells a neighbor, “Well, in the first grade he was unhappy because of his reading, but he’s doing better now.” Or “Don’t mind her, she’s a little shy.” This kind of talk makes kids feel like they are objects—possessions of their parents.

Set a child answer. In the presence of a child, parents are asked questions like “Does Johnny like school?” “Is Isabel helping with the new baby?” A mark of respect for a child’s autonomy is to say, “Let’s ask Johnny” or “Isabel can answer that.”

Respect your child’s readiness. Your child wants to do something but isn’t emotionally or physically ready for it: for example, use the bathroom like a “big girl” or go swimming though he’s still afraid of the water. Don’t force or embarrass the child. Express confidence in his or her ultimate readiness. “When you’re ready, you’ll get into the water.” “One of these days, you’ll use the bathroom just like Mommy.”

Aside from the obvious benefit to the child, this relieves a parent from having to be the “heavy” all the time. The school nurse can discuss sensible eating habits with an overweight child. The dentist can explain what happens to teeth when they aren’t brushed. Somehow all these outside sources carry more weight than volumes of talk from Mom and Dad.

What stands in our way?

What makes it so difficult to help our children become independent? First, there’s the matter of sheer convenience. Most of us are busy and in a hurry. We tend to button their buttons, tell them what to eat and what to wear because it just seems easier and faster.

Then, too, we have to cope with our strong feelings of connectedness to our kids. We have to fight against seeing every little failure on their part as our failure. It’s hard to allow children to make mistakes when a few words of our wisdom would protect them from pain and disappointment. It takes restraint and self-discipline as parents to not move in with advice—particularly when we’re so sure we have the answer.

▲ But there’s something even more that can get in the way of our natural desire to help our children separate from us. We remember so well the deep satisfaction that came from being so totally needed by small human beings. Despite our feelings of pride in our kids’ progress and joy in their growing up, it can also feel sad to no longer be needed in the same way.

It’s a bittersweet road parents travel. We start with a total commitment to a helpless human being. Over the years, we worry, plan, comfort and try to understand. We give our love, our labor, our knowledge and our experience—so that one day they will have the inner strength and confidence to go out on their own.

—Adapted from the authors book, “How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen Do Kids Will Talk” (Scribner). See We Recommend on page 8.
If you work in a remote location...

Q I work for a company with a small central office and lots of remote locations. My boss and I see each other rarely. We communicate by email and phone. This often feels too random. I need more connection. Any ideas?

—A.D., Lancaster, PA

A You’re part of a growing global work force that operates from many different locations. And too often, when workers communicate mainly by email and phone, their interactions tend to be incomplete and, as you’ve noticed, random.

Business expert Bruce Tulgan discussed this in a recent blog at www.rainmakerthinking.com. He says the key is to make better use of your telephone and electronic communications. Here’s what he suggests:

**SCHEDULE REGULAR ONE-ON-ONE PHONE MEETINGS DAILY OR WEEKLY, JUST AS IF YOU WERE IN THE SAME PLACE. HONOR THESE APPOINTMENTS.**

Do not leave voicemails saying, “I couldn’t make the call today.” Use two-way web-cams for these meetings, if they are available.

**IN ADVANCE OF YOUR ONE-ON-ONE PHONE MEETINGS, PREPARE!** Send your supervisor an email laying out the bullet points of what you’ve been doing and what you are planning to do next.

**WHENEVER YOU AND YOUR BOSS ARE AT THE SAME LOCATION, BE SURE TO SCHEDULE SOME ONE-ON-ONE FACE TIME TOGETHER.**

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**RESEARCH REVIEW**

Not so easy to ‘read’ someone’s feelings

Psychologists lately have leaned toward “inside” explanations of human behavior. As they see it, our genetic makeup pretty much determines who we are. Our feelings are “hardwired” into us and even the display of people’s facial expressions is universal, across cultures. This universality allows us to just “read” someone’s emotions that are plainly written on the face—happiness, anger, etc.

But a growing body of evidence suggests that our environment shapes even what we once considered to be the most “fixed” aspects of ourselves. In her studies, Boston College psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett, Ph.D., has found that “emotion perception” is driven largely by context—and we really have to know more about the situation to understand the emotions.

Dr. Barrett’s findings on context, reported in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, don’t negate the idea of basic biological human emotions, but they suggest the need to reconsider them. In her studies, she shows, for example, a photo of tennis ace Serena Williams’s face with what appears to be an angry expression. But, in fact, it’s an image of pure joy at winning a U.S. Open.

Facial expressions simply do not contain all the information we need to recognize emotion in other people. Factors such as social environment, posture, voices, scenes, words and culture routinely influence the emotions we see on the face of another person.

Another way of explaining it is that “situations matter,” says Tufts University psychologist Sam Sommers, Ph.D., the author of a book of that title. But even as our brains incorporate context into decoding a person’s facial expressions, Americans in particular tend to attribute behavior to fixed, internal features. “We’ve been encouraged to think we’re special,” says Dr. Sommers. “And we believe we have a core, true self waiting to be discovered.”

We may overlook the critical role of context because of our tendency to always champion the individual. But studies suggest that even our most intimate thoughts now appear to be shaped by the people around us.

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**Docs recommend ‘screen free’ for kids under two**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has reaffirmed its support for no TV for kids under age two. Dr. Ari Brown, author of the AAP’s new statement on media use, said, “Young children learn best from people, not screens.” The best way to help your child’s language skills is to read her or him a good old-fashioned book.

The guidelines do not directly address the use of newer digital devices with young children.

The AAP based its recommendation on studies of early childhood brain development, how young kids learn and the impact of various types of stimulation on the learning process.

“In today’s achievement culture,” says Dr. Brown, “the best thing you can do for your kids is to give them a chance to have unstructured play—both with you and independently. Children need this in order to figure out how the world works.”

The value of free play and the importance of reading are themes of the statement at www.aap.org.
Caring for elderly parents can bring families closer together, but there may be some unspoken realities that are difficult to accept. You can’t afford to ignore them, however, because they can provide a realistic basis for your actions and decisions. For example:

► Your parents may never come around to your way of thinking. If you try to impose your will over theirs, your parents may: (a) stop talking with you, (b) become even more stubborn, (c) comply grudgingly but undermine your efforts or (c) surrender and become dependent on you. Be willing to give a little. Find a compromise and accept an outcome that falls short of your wishes.

► Your parents have the right to make their own decisions. Contrary to popular belief, you never become your “parents’ parent.” Even when you become a caregiver, you are your parents’ helper. Although you may have to make decisions for them, you will always remain their child. If their judgment is impaired, you will have to act in their best interest. If they are rude, you may need to assert yourself strongly. But to the extent possible, show your parents respect.

► Something good may come from simply talking. Even if you can’t agree and a discussion with your parents serves no purpose other than to clarify each other’s wishes and concerns, your time was well spent. For example, you think your mother should give up her apartment, but she insists that she can still manage on her own. Your mother knows that you’re concerned about her, and you know that you can try again.

► Not being clear about what you want can lead to decisions no one wants. The failure to discuss matters with each other and get things out in the open can lead to bad decisions. If your mother moves in with you because she thinks that’s what you want, and you ask her to move in because you think that’s what she wants, you may end up with a solution that makes neither of you happy.

► Your parents may not tell you they need help. And they may deny it if you ask. “I don’t want you to worry” is a phrase you are likely to hear. Parents don’t want to be a burden—or face their own decline. For reasons of pride or fear, they may conceal their needs, mask their distress or minimize their concerns.

► Logic doesn’t always count. The best decision may not be the most logical or sensible one. Sometimes practicality needs to take a backseat to your parents’ emotional needs. For example, if keeping money in a checking account gives your mother peace of mind, you are right to acquiesce and leave it there.

► Sometimes you can do little or nothing to help. Witnessing a parent’s becoming frail or struggling with illness makes you want to do something to help. But insisting that he or she take vitamins, for example, may just create the illusion that you’re helping. Remember that patience, companionship and caring are more valuable than hasty actions designed to relieve your own anxiety.

► Timing counts. The same help, given at different times under different circumstances, can be constructive or destructive. For example, if your mother enjoys washing the dishes after you leave, don’t insist on doing them yourself, but if her unsteady hands make the task unsafe, it is a kindness to help out.

► Today’s solution may be out of date tomorrow. As your parents’ needs change and they become more frail, solutions that worked once must be reevaluated. For example, you may have to arrange for more help and, eventually, you may find that your parents can no longer remain safely at home.

—Adapted from the authors’ book “Are Your Parents Driving You Crazy: How to Resolve the Most Common Dilemmas with Aging Parents” (visit www.vandb.com)

WFL April 2012 ◆ www.workandfamilylife.com

Practical realities for elder caregiving

By Joseph A. Ilardo, Ph.D., and Carole R. Rothman, Ph.D.

Elder care also involves your siblings and other family members. Here are a few more realities for families sharing the care to consider:

► IF A FAMILY MEMBER has not been emotionally connected to the family, don’t expect it to happen now. If he or she is in a position to write a check, it may be worth asking for help, but don’t be too surprised if the answer is “no.”

► OLD FAMILY PATTERNS die hard. For example, if one sibling was always the “good” child and another the “self-server,” these roles are likely to continue in a crisis.

► SOME FAMILY MEMBERS can make elder care problems worse. They can be obstructionists. They can be too disturbed personally to be helpful or they can be dishonest in their behavior.

► SOMETIMES FAMILY HISTORY simply can’t be ignored. If there were bad feelings between your parents and your partner or spouse, those feelings will not disappear. If there were specific conflicts, the fallout can be extreme.

If, even now, your spouse can’t stand your parents, he or she will probably resent the time you spent providing care for them. Or your parents may be unwilling to accept help from someone they dislike.

But whatever is going on, it remains crucial for families to figure out ways to get along with each other. You need to work together and to work through your differences for the common goal of caring for your aging parent. If you don’t manage to do this, your parents will suffer—and you will too.

—J.A.L. & C.R.R.
Ways to lower the high cost of college

By Doug and Polly White

College is so expensive these days. Even a moderately priced school can break the budget of many American families. But we can make it easier on ourselves. Here are some ideas:

Focus on academic performance in high school. Only 2 percent of high school athletes earn a scholarship to play that sport in college. But half of the students at many colleges earn some financial aid based on academics. If you hope to defray costs through scholarships, focus on academics, not athletics.

Colleges base financial aid on a student’s high school GPA, class rank, SAT scores and the academic rigor of the school. If kids have a choice, encourage them to attend the best school possible and take college-prep and advanced placement courses. An A in calculus or second-year French means more than an A in a nonacademic class. Money invested in a math tutor is more likely to yield a return than money spent on sports “extras.”

Pass on your “stretch” school. A student who receives significant merit-based aid at one school may receive much less from another. Many kids apply to both “stretch” and “safe” schools. But if it’s truly a stretch, the student may well be at the bottom of the academic pecking order and receive little or no merit-based aid. This same student could be much more attractive to the safe school and might receive significant merit-based aid. It’s difficult to pass on anyone’s dream school, but doing so could be worth thousands of dollars over four years.

Maximize your need-based aid. Depending on a school’s sticker price and how many people in your household are in college, even families with annual income of $300,000 may qualify for aid. Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), and it will calculate your EFC (Expected Family Contribution). The price of your school minus your EFC becomes your “demonstrated need.” Schools don’t always meet 100 percent of demonstrated need, but it’s worth a try.

Before completing the FAFSA, try to lower your EFC. For example, pay off credit card debt, prepay your mortgage, buy the car you’ve been waiting to buy, or increase your contributions to a retirement account. Remember, you can borrow for college, but not for retirement.

If Mom is planning to pursue an Executive MBA, doing so while kids are in college will also increase your demonstrated need. For more tips on increasing need-based aid: check out www.FinAid.org and Paying for College Without Going Broke from The Princeton Review.

Think about community colleges. They are typically less expensive than four-year colleges, and students can often live at home. Many four-year schools are anxious to accept transfer students from community colleges because they have empty seats in upper level courses.

Some colleges even guarantee acceptance to students who have completed specific coursework at a particular community college and have done well academically. While community colleges can be less challenging than a four-year college, students can still get a good education that will prepare them to complete their baccalaureate degree. The key is for students to push themselves to do more than meet minimum requirements.

Graduate in four years. Spending additional years in college can quickly raise the price of a higher education. Tuition and fees tend to go up every year, but financial aid typically does not. Years five and six will be more expensive than years one and two.

The percentage of students who graduate in four years varies widely by school. It’s not unusual for half of the students at a large, state school to take additional semesters to graduate, while a much higher percentage of students at small, private schools complete their work in four years or even less. The school that seemed like a good deal up front could be more expensive if it takes longer to graduate. When you’re selecting a school, consider its graduation rates.

—Doug and Polly White are management consultants and co-authors of award-winning book “Let Go to GROW” (Palari)—and they’ve sent their three children to college.

See WhitestonePartnersInc.com.

Try to stay calm during the process

In their book “The Launching Years: Strategies for Parenting from Senior Year to College Life,” authors Laura S. Kastner, Ph.D., and Jennifer Wyatt, Ph.D., encourage parents to stay calm during the college application process. In fact, they say the more intense parents are during the process, the more likely their children will be to delay in meeting deadlines.

After all, friction at home gives high school seniors the perfect “out.” They can waste time fighting with their parents instead of moving forward with what they need to do.

The authors suggest:

AGREE to not talk about deadlines if your high school senior will agree to turn in everything at least a week before it is due. If this seems unlikely, think about asking a trusted friend to work with your child on the entire process or you may consider hiring a college admissions adviser.

BADGERING, bribing and threatening are off-limits, but small acts of behind-the-scenes technical support are legitimate. For example, help your high school senior set up a quiet space and time and provide great snacks.

IT’S OK for parents to do some legwork such as setting up appointments, making phone calls and downloading forms. Being able to do something concrete can ease the tension and perhaps avoid a power struggle.

Just make sure that your child stays in charge and does the real work.

THE CALMER you feel, the less likely you are to nag, and the more likely your high school senior will be to assume ownership of the process in her or his own way.
Here’s a 5-step formula to cool everyone down

By Sybil Evans

I don’t care what your skills are, Jane, you just won’t fit in with my group, Al said. “You’re way too judgmental. Look for another team to join.”

Clearly, Jane is one of those people who pushes Al’s “hot buttons.” But now his boss has told him that his new team needs Jane’s technical skills.

Jane was shocked by what Al said. Granted, their previous working relationship was rather tense, but she knows that she’s well-qualified to work on the new project and is eager for the opportunity to do so.

How should she react to Al’s zinger? Zap him right back? Defend herself?

Her best bet is to try this five-step formula for resolving conflict and cooling down.

**Step 1: Watch the play**

Jane mentally steps back and watches the scene that’s unfolding as if she were watching a play. On the stage are two people: one angry, the other misunderstood. Simple as it may seem, this act of observation helps Jane gain equilibrium. She feels cooler and more controlled because she has taken herself out of the action. She’s just watching. Now she’s ready for the next step.

“I’m glad we got that figured out before we start our new project.”

**Step 2: Confirm**

A confirming statement for Jane might be: “I’ve never heard you say anything like this before, Al. You sound really angry. Can we talk about it some more?”

This response takes Al by surprise. He sees that Jane is being reasonable and nonjudgmental.

She has managed to diffuse his anger and hers as well. Although Jane is still bothered by what Al said, her “confirming” remarks indicate that she does not think that Al is either evil or stupid to feel the way he does.

Now the two of them are ready to talk to each other.

**Step 3: Get more information**

Jane might start by asking why Al feels the way he does. She listens to him without interruption, and then asks several pertinent questions (see tinted text below). Jane responds when it’s appropriate and looks for areas of common interest.

**Step 4: Assert your own interests and needs**

Jane makes sure that Al is satisfied that his side of the story has been told. Then she can say to him, “I would like to tell you how I see the situation.”

Now Jane describes their relationship from her perspective and shares her reaction to Al’s behavior and says something about how it might affect her ability to do the job. She identifies issues of mutual concern. Al listens to Jane because she listened to him.

**Step 5: Find common ground**

Jane makes the transition to the problem-solving mode by empathizing with Al. They both realize that they have to be a little more flexible in dealing with each other’s quirks. They share a few ideas about what makes a productive team. Jane recognizes that they can both gain personally by understanding and accepting each other’s work styles and behaviors.

Figuring out a way to turn off their hot buttons gives Jane and Al an opportunity to dig deeper into their workplace conflict and to accept mutual responsibility for past misunderstandings and negative assumptions. Now they are in a good position to come up with new and creative ways to work together smoothly as they launch their team.

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The author is the author of “Hot Buttons: How to Resolve Conflict and Cool Everyone Down” (Harper-Collins).

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Here’s a 5-step formula to cool everyone down

**Ask these questions can defuse conflict**

- **How did the conflict start?** This is a question you should first ask yourself. Try breaking down the conflict into smaller issues that are easier to deal with.
- **How do you see the situation that’s troubling you?** Listen closely to what the other person has to say.
- **May I share how I feel about it?** Link some of your ideas to what the other person has just said.
- **What are some of the underlying issues feeding this conflict?** This will help start communication on a deeper level.
- **How have I contributed to the conflict?** Acknowledging your role in a problem leads to a willingness to take responsibility for its outcome.
- **What have I done to press your hot buttons?** You may find out something about your behavior that you never knew.
- **How has this affected you?** Now you’re digging deeper—to the other person’s feelings rather than the facts.
- **Can I tell you how my hot buttons have been pressed?** Here’s your chance to say what’s bothering you.
- **What do you want to have happen?** Now you’re ready to look at solutions. This question gets to the basic needs of the other person.
- **How can we work this out so that each of our own needs is met?** The key word is “we.” We all need understanding, security, recognition and praise. When we can acknowledge and express our mutual and varying needs, our relationships can grow richer and more rewarding.

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Hamstrings help protect your knees

You might ask, “What do the three hamstring muscles that run down the back of my thigh have to do with my knees?” A lot, it would seem.

“The hamstrings move our legs behind us, bend our knees and straighten our trunk from a forward bent position at the hip,” says physical therapist Davis Reyes of the Weill Cornell Hospital for Special Surgery.

The hamstrings enable us to perform the daily activities of walking and climbing stairs. They counter-balance the quadriceps muscles in the front of our thighs that allow us to straighten our legs.

In other words, quadriceps and hamstrings perform opposite actions, and they work together to move our legs.

All of these muscles need to be strong, says Reyes. Weak hamstrings in particular can destabilize your knees and make you more vulnerable to ligament (ACL) injuries.

To reduce your risk of strain or tear, include hamstring exercises in your workout such as lunges, stretches and hamstring curls. Cycling for 5-10 minutes at moderate intensity can also be helpful.

Just be aware that inactivity as well as improper conditioning can lead to a weakening of the hamstring muscles.

To see exercise techniques done properly, visit the website www.mayoclinic.org and search for the key words hamstring curl and hamstring stretching.

—Adapted from the Women’s Nutrition Connection newsletter

This ‘fish story’ has a happy ending

Eating fish is good for the head as well as the heart. One new study found that older adults who ate baked or broiled fish at least once a week had healthier brains (based on MRI scans) and lower rates of mild cognitive impairment or dementia.

Official dietary guidelines now recommend eating two servings of fish a week, about eight ounces. But U.S. fish consumption is very low, especially if you don’t count the deep-fried variety. On average, Americans eat 16 pounds of seafood a year, compared to a whopping 220 pounds in Iceland.

Granted, per capita fish-consumption in Iceland is the world’s highest, but Icelanders also enjoy a higher average life expectancy than Americans.

“The advantages of eating fish are many,” says dietician Alice H. Lichtenstein of the Tufts University Cardiovascular Nutrition Laboratory. “Fish offers heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids and is low in calories and saturated fat.”

Scientists credit the omega-3s for the brain benefits. Fish oils help increase blood flow to the brain, fight inflammation and prevent the accumulation of plaque.

“Consuming baked or broiled fish promotes stronger neurons in the brain’s gray matter by making them larger and healthier,” says Cyrus Raji, M.D., Ph.D., who led the Cardiovascular Health Study at the University of Pittsburgh. “This simple lifestyle choice increases the brain’s resistance to Alzheimer’s disease and lowers risk for the disorder.”

But let’s not split hairs. Says Lichtenstein: “Let’s get people eating more fish, and then worry about fine-tuning either the fish’s diet or our diet to edge up the omega-3 content.”

Eco-savvy fish shopping

Clearly, eating fish is good for us, but is it good for the planet? Over-fishing is a problem and fish farms contribute to pollution, among other issues. Here are some tools to help you make smart shopping decisions:

- **MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM SEAFOOD WATCH** has pocket guides and convenient mobile apps. Go to www.montereybayaquarium.org.


- **BLUE OCEAN INSTITUTE** has an iPhone app FishPhone and a seafood guide text-message service. See www.blueocean.org.

—Adapted from Tufts University’s Health & Nutrition Letter

More than just a pretty face

There’s a reason artists like Cezanne have made the pear a perennial subject of still life paintings. It’s beautiful. The pear has an elegant shape with a unique surface that looks at once grainy, buttery and crisp. But the joys of this fruit don’t end with its appearance.

Pears nutritionally supply fiber and vitamin C. They contain antioxidants that help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. They also have anti-inflammatory and blood-pressure lowering properties that protect the heart and encourage blood flow to the brain.

And recently Dutch researchers have suggested that pears, along with apples, may specifically benefit the brain by protecting against stroke. A large, 10-year study found that participants who consumed the most white-flesh fruits and vegetables—mainly pears and apples—had a risk of stroke that was 52 percent lower than participants who consumed the least white-flesh foods.

Pears go well with a great variety of foods, from cheese to bitter greens. They can be poached, baked, sautéed, steamed and puréed, or stewed.

Pears are at their peak when they’re fully ripe and raw. They ripen best off the tree at room temperature. These days there are more than 3,000 varieties of pear. They are not all being cultivated, of course, but enough are to make pears available to most of us throughout the year.

—Adapted from Tufts University’s Health & Nutrition Letter
Learning to talk (and listen) to children

Since this important how-to book was first published more than 30 years ago, it has become a “parenting bible” with more than 3 million copies in print in 30 countries around the world.

Now the celebrated authors Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish have updated their original book with fresh insights and suggestions for a new generation of readers. As ever, the book helps parents develop the know-how to be more effective with their children and more supportive of themselves in the process.

Filled with sensible, practical approaches to solve everyday problems, parents can learn, as the title suggests, how to talk to kids so they will listen, and listen so they will talk.

The authors offer innovative ways to:

- Help children grow up to become separate and independent people (see front page article).
- Cope with children’s negative feelings such as frustration, anger and disappointment.
- Express your own strong feelings without being hurtful.
- Engage your child’s willingness to be cooperative.
- Set firm limits and maintain goodwill.
- Use alternatives to punishment that will promote self-discipline.
- Learn how to praise. Understand the difference between helpful and unhelpful praise.
- Learn to solve conflicts peacefully.

The book provides exercises to give you a chance to practice what you’ve learned at your own pace—by yourself or with a friend. It also offers examples of helpful dialogue so you can adapt this “new language” to your own personal style.

The authors talk about their personal experiences, answer commonly asked questions and include stories and insights that parents have shared with them in many workshops.

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk (Scribner, paperback, $18) is available in bookstores, online and a first-ever e-book edition.

Work & Family Life provides information and practical solutions to a wide range of family, job, and health issues. Our purpose is to help our readers reduce their stress and find pleasure and satisfaction in their many roles at work, at home, and in their communities.