

Independence Among Learners with ASD

This article was initially written for interventionists working with children with ASD. We believe that parents could learn from it as they would be able to apply concepts and strategies presented in their family and daily life.

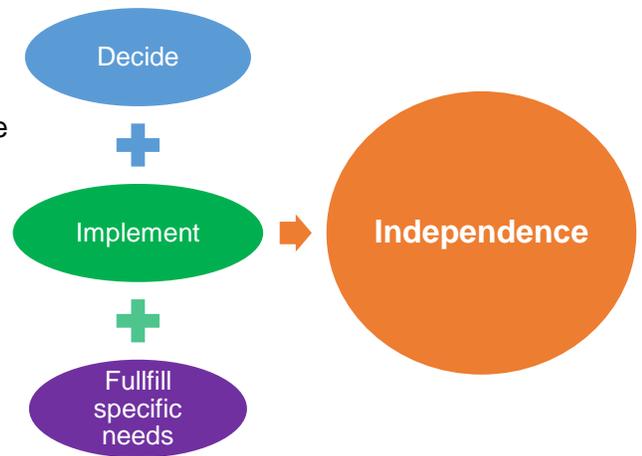
Originally published in March 2019

Dominic is an eight-year-old boy with ASD. During a meeting with the school team, Dominic's parents admitted that despite their son's learning progress, it was still very hard for them to manage Dominic's behaviour at home. Because of the family's working schedule and Dominic's brother's activities, Dominic is often home with only one parent. The child must be supervised at all times as he climbs on every piece of furniture and then jumps off of it. Also, his behavioural tantrums made it challenging to go out and do things in the community. His parents therefore asked the professionals in charge of his learning plan how they could help him become more independent.

What is independence?

Independence can be defined as being the "capacity of a person to **decide**, **implement his/her decisions** and **fulfill his/her specific needs** without constraints" (free translation of Rocque, Langevin, Drouin and Faille, 1999). When individuals are independent, they have the freedom to choose, and that greatly improves their quality of life and gives them the opportunity to actively contribute to their community. Independent children can accomplish daily tasks without anyone's help. This in return will give them a feeling of pride, and subsequently improve their self-confidence.

Rocque, S., Langevin, J., Drouin, C. and Faille, J. (1999). *De l'autonomie à la réduction des dépendances*. Montréal : Éditions Nouvelles.



Why focus on independence with learners with ASD?

Despite their potential, many learners with ASD rely a lot on others, in a variety of areas such as functional life skills, social expectations, etc. Developing the autonomy of learners with ASD should be targeted from a very early age. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, as people do not realize the impact of their actions.

The overuse of prompting or continued support from adults do not allow learners with ASD to demonstrate the skills they learned nor to respond spontaneously. It is critical that adults supporting learners with ASD understand the importance of reducing support as quickly as possible to allow learners to respond independently. We must ensure that learners are given the opportunity to make requests on their own and to meet their own needs rather than always anticipating.

Independence is:

- A critical ability to develop with all learners with ASD;
- The result of a rigorous and consistent planning; and
- A doorway to a myriad of learning opportunities for our learners!