

## LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

### What is this developmental skill?

Learned helplessness occurs when children begin believing that their actions have little or no influence over what happens to them. Rather than trying to solve problems, they expect failure or assume that nothing they do will matter.

### How does this normally develop?

Healthy development moves children toward increasing confidence and independence. When caregivers consistently respond to children's efforts and encourage persistence, children learn that trying often leads to positive outcomes.

### How can neglect interfere?

Neglect places children in situations where their needs may go unmet regardless of what they do. Over time, they may stop asking for help, stop trying to solve problems, or believe they have no control over their lives. These beliefs can persist even after they enter safe environments.

### What might this look like?

A child may:

- Say, "It doesn't matter."
- Refuse to attempt tasks they can complete.
- Depend excessively on adults.
- Give up before trying.
- Appear emotionally withdrawn or hopeless.

### Parenting Implications

Offer experiences where your child's efforts lead to success. Start with achievable challenges and gradually increase difficulty. Avoid taking over tasks too quickly, as children need opportunities to discover their own effectiveness.

### From Understanding to Attunement

What looks like laziness or lack of motivation may actually reflect years of believing that trying would not change anything. Consistent encouragement helps rebuild hope.