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Helping Children to Make Choices

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Why Is It Important for Children to Make Choices?

Everyone makes choices. Even babies make choices. Have you ever seen the mother of a crying baby offer the infant a rattle? When she holds the rattle up, the baby makes a choice. If he wants the rattle, he stops crying. If he doesn't want the rattle, he continues to cry until he is given another choice. When we give children the opportunity to make choices, we give them a chance to gain a little bit of control over their surroundings.

When children feel like they have some control, they are less likely to act out and misbehave. Giving children opportunities to make simple choices when they are young helps them to be more confident when they make more difficult decisions later.

Tips to Encourage Children to Make Choices

Like any skill, in order to learn how to make good choices, children must *practice* making choices.

Here are some tips you can use to encourage your children to make choices:



- **Limit your children's choices.** Give them two items to choose from. For example, if your children are having difficulty deciding which book they want you to read to them, give them only two choices— "Would you like the bear story or the farm story?"



- **Make one choice something your children don't like.** To encourage your children to make a choice, try letting them pick between something you know they like and something you know they dislike. For example, "Do you want carrots or lima beans for a snack?"



- **Hold real objects up in front of your children.** Show your children their options. For example, if you're in the grocery store and your children can't decide which cereal they want to get, hold up their choices and ask them to pick one.



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- **Talk to your children about their poor choices.** We learn from our mistakes! Ask your children questions that make them think about their actions. For example, "When you decided to draw on the wall, was that a good choice?" "How do you think that made Mom feel?" "What other choice could you have made instead?" "What do you think will happen because you made a poor choice?"



- **Let your children make a choice about an activity they dislike.** Don't ask your children if they want to do the activity. Instead, ask what they would like to use for the activity. For example, "When you brush your teeth, do you want to use the bubblegum-flavored toothpaste or the mint?"



- **Read stories with your children.** Talk about the choices that the characters in the story make. For example, "What should the princess do?" "What choice did she make?" "What do you think would have happened if she had made a different choice?"



- **Give your children the chance to make choices.** Let them pick out their clothes, choose their snack, or pick the toy they want to take to Grandma's house. When they are able to make choices for themselves, ask them to make choices that affect others—for example, "Should we have chicken or spaghetti for dinner tonight?"



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