

The Power of Choice



Would you like to get your kids to willingly cooperate? Stop the daily battles? Teach your kids valuable life skills? If your answer is Yes, Yes, Yes, read on:

Do you sound like a drill sergeant? There are so many things we must get our children to do and so many things we must stop them from doing! *Get up. Get dressed. Don't dawdle. Do your homework. Eat. Don't hit your brother.* It goes on and on. And to make matters worse – our kids resist our orders and demands.

There is an effective solution! We can get our kids to cooperate and at the same time allow them to learn self-discipline and develop good decision-making skills. How?

Offer choices

Children love having the privilege of choice. It takes the pressure out of your request and allows a child to feel in control, and thus be more willing to comply. This is a powerful tool that can be used with toddlers through teens.

- **How many choices?** Younger children can handle two choices: Milk or juice? Sneakers or shoes? You do it or me? Walk or run? As children get older we can offer more choices: Before dinner, after dinner, or in the morning? Wear your coat, carry it, or put on a sweatshirt? Teens can be given general guidelines and rules.
- **Be specific.** If you ask, “*What do you want for breakfast?*” and your child answers “*pizza*” you’ve set yourself up for a battle. Instead offer choices or options that are all good for her, “*Do you want toast and fruit, cereal or waffles?*”
- **Use time as a choice.** Often there really is only ONE acceptable choice. You wouldn’t say, “*Do you want to go to bed tonight or tomorrow?*” You could say, “*Do you want to watch 5 more minutes of TV or 10?*” “*What do you want to do first, brush your teeth or put on your pajamas?*”
- **If your child won’t choose?** Offer a choice! (!?What??) Yes! It still works! “*Do you want to choose, or shall I choose for you?*” If your child gets stubborn, you can say, “*I see you want me to choose.*” Then follow through! For example, what if you ask your child if she wants to do her homework before dinner, after dinner or in the morning and she “*decides*” to go to bed without doing her homework. Just wake her [cheerfully] at 6:00 am with a gentle reminder that it was her choice to do it this way.
- **Giving choices ends struggles.** Offering choices is a peaceful way to encourage cooperation while avoiding the power struggles that so often erupt when a parent gives an order. When a child chooses his own plan of action he is more likely to follow through with a pleasant attitude, and learn decision-making skills that he will carry with him to adulthood. So, do you want to start offering choices today or tomorrow?

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of “Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting.”

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