



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 of options that are, all good for you, "Do you want toast, cereal or waffles?"

Use time as a choice.

Often there really is only ONE acceptable option. 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 more?" "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. You're doing your child a favor.

When you get in the habit of offering choices you are giving your child valuable life lessons. As children learn to make simple choices (milk or juice) they get the practice required to make bigger choices (buy one sweatshirt or two t-shirts) which gives them the ability to make even bigger, more important decisions (save or spend? study or fail? drink beer or soda?)

Giving choices ends struggles. Offering choices is a peaceful way to encourage cooperation while avoiding the power struggle that so often erupts 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.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting