

Parenting Your Child Effectively: Give Choices

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Sometimes we need something right now to help us calm an emotional discussion with our children. When things are difficult, we are most likely to “lose our cool” and say or do things that we wish later we hadn’t. We need something that settles the conflict without either the child or the parent feeling put down. There are a number of guidance principles that help us discipline in stressful times.

Guidance Principle

Give children choices. This is a good method because it helps children learn decision-making skills. It also helps them feel a sense of control in their lives. Give only one or two choices. Let them select which choice they want and then go along with it. Children take us seriously when we offer them choices. A difficult situation often happens because parents offer choices they don’t really mean. Only offer children choices when all of the options are realistic and safe.

Situation	Might Cause Trouble	Instead Try
The children are camping out under the kitchen table.	“Would you like to come to lunch now?” (They might say ‘no’, they want to keep playing.)	“You campers will know it’s lunch time when the timer rings in 5 minutes,” as you set the timer.
It’s shopping day and you are short on groceries.	“What would you like for breakfast today, kids?”	“Would you like toast or cereal with your juice for breakfast?”
Your child is getting dressed for school.	“What would you like to wear to school?”	
You have told the children you would do something special today, but you have no extra money to spend.	“What special thing did you kids decide you want to do today?”	

Acknowledgment

This fact sheet contains guidelines to help parents interact with their children. It was reformatted from NebGuide G1991 (Revised May 1997) written by Herbert G. Lingren, Extension Family Life Specialist.

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