



Strategies for Teaching Children to Make Good Choices

Choice is a big part of people's lives. We decide daily what to wear, what to do, and how to treat people. Teaching children how to make good choices is critical for independence and self-control. This article focuses on a variety of strategies for teaching choice making.

- 1. Allow Children to Make Choices** - Often it is easier to choose for children than allow them to decide for themselves. Unfortunately, lessons learned by making good and bad choices help children become responsible, independent adults. Choice also gives children a sense of ownership in activities. Take time to offer choices, create situations for choice, and reinforce the importance of good choices in your day.
- 2. Limit Choices** - Keep the number and types of choices within reasonable limits. For example, if you let a child pick a snack, give them two or three healthy choices. By providing only allowable choices you reduce opportunities for conflict and create a situation where they succeed at making a good choice.
- 3. Discuss Options** – When faced with decisions, think through and discuss the options to help children understand why one choice is better than another. Discuss possible choices, consequences, and why one option is better. For example, when leaving the house look outside and discuss the weather. Is it cold? Is it raining? Which coat is the better choice? What happens if you pick the light cotton coat and it rains? By guiding children through choices you teach them how to make decisions for themselves.
- 4. Consider Other People** – When decisions involve other people, discuss the implications of the choice for the other people. For example, if a child wants to use the swing for the duration of recess discuss: Have other people asked to use the swing? Are other children waiting for the swing? How would you feel if you didn't have a chance to use the swing? Are there other places you can play for part of recess? This helps children realize their choices affect people other than themselves.
- 6. Use Past Choices as Opportunities** – When a child makes a bad choice such as cutting in line, saying something hurtful, or playing rather than finishing homework, use the opportunity to discuss why the choice was bad, consequences, and better choices for the future. Ask the child what other choices they could have made and what may have happened. Additionally, use past decisions and consequences as reminders. For example, "Noah, remember how you played video games rather than clean your room yesterday and had to miss your favorite show and clean up? What do you think you should do today?"
- 7. Praise Good Choices** – When children make good decisions let them know what they did and why it was a good choice. For example, "Jason, I like the way you moved over to make room for Ella on the bus. It was nice of you to share your seat. That was a very good choice."
- 8. State When There Is No Choice** – Some situations such as safety and schedules have no choices. Holding hands crossing the street, participating in fire drills, and leaving on time for school are examples of times when there is no choice. Explain why these situations do not have choices and why all people must follow certain rules and schedules. Let children know if there is an aspect of the event that is their choice. For example, "We have to leave now for the bus, but you can carry your blue or red book bag."

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