Between Families Newsletter 2022

The Use of Choice in Early Childhood

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Another way to create harmony and obedience in children is by using the "choice" technique. In this Younger children should be offered only a small number of choices, ideally no more than 2 or 3 at a time. Too many choices will overwhelm children and complicate the situation. All the choices to be offered are selected in advance by parents and are therefore acceptable and appropriate.

Offering children the option to choose from among acceptable choices allows them healthy room to assert themselves and their unique personalities, while still constraining them to be obedient. Offering children a choice facilitates cooperation and usually avoids a war of the wills. Often at this age, young children will say, "No" to something parents impose on them, simply to exert their independence. This stubbornness isn't necessarily bad. Instead, it's a sign of children's developing individuality. If parents give children two choices, such as oat O's or wheat flakes for breakfast, everyone's needs can be met. The child gets to choose between healthy alternatives, saying "No" to one of them, and there isn't a battle about breakfast.

When parents start integrating the use of choice into their repertoire, simple everyday tasks such as getting dressed in the morning can be completed more quickly. For example, say that Billy refuses to wear the yellow polo shirt and khakis that Mom pulls out of the closet, even though he loved them just last week. Instead, he wants to wear his swim trunks and flip-flops to school. He may begin to pout and to refuse to get dressed, while Mom asserts the need to get dressed immediately to avoid being late for school. Both sides are firm in their conviction. Billy wants to show his independence and choose what he wants to wear. Mom wants to see her son dressed appropriately for the weather and the activity, and still make it to work on time. A simple use of choice could diffuse this entire situation. Mom could start off by saying, "Billy, what would you like to wear today? Your blue striped polo or your green sweatshirt?" Billy can pick the shirt he likes, and show Mom that he wants some control over his life. Mom will feel satisfied that her child will stay warm at school and everyone can get to school and work on time.

The choice technique need not be limited to helping children negotiate breakfast or choosing an outfit. Instead, it can be successfully applied in many settings and decision points. For instance, parents can say to children: "Choose cereal or toast" at the restaurant, "Choose the turtle book or the space book", at the library, and "Hold my left hand or my right hand, when crossing the street. Choice can also be used to make certain chores or less-desirable activities more pleasant for kids. Something as small as choosing whether to take a bath before or after the weekly call to Grandpa, or choosing whether to eat peas before or after the chicken leg can powerfully motivate young children to behave.

Offering children choices is a way of offering them control over their lives without putting them at risk. While making such simple choices may seem insignificant to adults, choice conveys to children that their unique preferences are important, and can dramatically decrease the number of daily battles that must be fought. Giving children small choices teaches them that they have the ability and the responsibility to make larger choices in life, such as whether to follow or to break rules. To take this a step further, children who are allowed to choose learn that deciding between a good choice or a bad choice is actually deciding between a positive outcome or a predictable and undesirable negative consequence. Maintaining discipline can then be explained to children as a simple case of their making a choice between consequences. Treating misbehavior as a bad choice (rather than saying or implying that children themselves are bad) helps teach children to follow the rules without decreasing their self-esteem.

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Choice in Early Childhood

**Please complete the questionnaire for ½ credit**

1. How many choices should you give a young child using the “choice” technique?
   1. 5-6
   2. 2-3
   3. 4-5
2. Who should choose the options?
   1. The parent/s
   2. The Child
3. Offering children a choice facilitates what?
   1. Team building
   2. Cooperation
   3. Collaboration
   4. Consolidation
4. When a child says “no” to a direction, what does the paper suggest they are doing?
   1. Being defiant
   2. Starting a fight
   3. Developing individuality
   4. Attempting to get a reaction out of you.
5. Giving a child two choices that you choose both ensures acceptable options and allows the child to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?
6. Where can choices be used?
   1. At breakfast
   2. At the library
   3. At dinner time
   4. All of the above and more
7. Offering choices allows children to feel like they have \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ over their lives.
8. (true/false) Offering choices helps take away risk for children as they attempt to take some control.
9. Giving choices to a child can help them feel like their uniqueness is:
   1. Important
   2. Not important
10. (true/false) Giving children choices now can help set the child up for larger more difficult decisions in the future.

Answers are in Red

1. How many choices should you give a young child using the “choice” technique?
   1. 5-6
   2. 2-3
   3. 4-5
2. Who should choose the options?
   1. The parent/s
   2. The Child
3. Offering children a choice facilitates what?
   1. Team building
   2. Cooperation
   3. Collaboration
   4. Consolidation
4. When a child says “no” to a direction, what does the paper suggest they are doing?
   1. Being defiant
   2. Starting a fight
   3. Developing individuality
   4. Attempting to get a reaction out of you.
5. Giving a child two choices that you choose both ensures acceptable options and allows the child to? Choose, assert their individuality, or make a decision are all acceptable options.
6. Where can choices be used?
   1. At breakfast
   2. At the library
   3. At dinner time
   4. All of the above and more
7. Offering choices allows children to feel like they have control over their lives.
8. (true/false) Offering choices helps take away risk for children as they attempt to take some control.
9. Giving choices to a child can help them feel like their uniqueness is:
   1. Important
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10. (true/false) Giving children choices now can help set the child up for larger more difficult decisions in the future.