



Teach Children to Make Good Choices

By Beula Postlewait, Communications Representative

Sometimes, it is easier to tell children what to do than it is to guide them in making a choice. However, teens and young adults may fail to make good choices because they have always depended on others to make decisions for them.

Children cannot control many situations in their life: where they attend school, the people in their families, and the financial circumstances of their homes. However, there are many choices they can make if the adults in their lives will allow them to do so. If you teach a child in the early years of life to make simple choices, he or she will find it easier to make good choices as a teen or an adult. Children need to practice making choices throughout childhood, experiencing the consequences of wrong choices, and enjoying the self-esteem that comes from experiencing the results of good choices.

Why should we teach children to make good decisions?

1. Decision-making creates a sense of responsibility. The choice of cereal, the shirt or blouse to wear, the socks, the shoes, the flavor of toothpaste, the book or puzzle to use, the colors to use—these seem like simple choices. However, some children never get to make such decisions. When you give a child the opportunity to make choices, it creates in the child a sense of self-worth and responsibility.
2. Decision-making creates a sense of independence. As children develop, they quickly reach the “me do it” stage. I can use that glue bottle. I can use that paint. I want to tape the picture in place. I want to pour the milk. I want to pass the cookies. I want to choose my clothes. I want to choose my music or TV program. Being able to make such healthy decisions leads to an independent spirit. Sometimes, a parent or teacher might need to curtail options that would harm or injure them. In most cases, children need to have the opportunity to try new things and

use their emerging skills. Make a game out of duties you want the child to do, such as putting away supplies or toys. Children are more likely to choose an option that is fun.

3. Decision-making creates a sense of confidence. Children who have always depended on others for everything will find it difficult to make decisions when away from home or school. Other people may easily sway these children to make the wrong decision. Affirm children who make right choices and build their confidence for making future decisions.

How do you teach children to make good decisions?

1. Start when children are young and let them make age-appropriate decisions from several options. "Which of these two healthy snacks would you like?" "Which of these puzzles would you like to use?"
2. Support the child's decision even if it is not what you would do. If a child wants to color the bananas with a purple crayon, that is fine. If a child wants to pair stripes and plaids for everyday clothes, that is fine. Affirm the child's decision if it is appropriate.
3. As children mature, give them more opportunities to make choices from options. Let them choose the object to take for "Show and Tell." Give them options for an activity for outdoor time. Let the children decide whether to do a project in pairs or small groups. Let the children decide if they want to write or draw a response to a story. Let them decide whether they will have 3, 4, or 5 play practices. Guess what they will choose!
4. Give children an opportunity to discuss all the options and consequences of a decision before making the decision. If a child observes another child doing something wrong, use this to help the child think about all the options the other child had in making the choice and all the possible consequences of that choice. Help a child understand not only the options to almost any choice but also the outcomes of each choice. Let children decide which of two Bible verses or poems to memorize. Decide on a part to play in a drama (rather than assigning parts). Let the class vote on a service project for the class. Decide from options how to review a story or book.
5. Let the children experience the consequences of their choices. When the results are good, affirm the children and let them know the choice was a good one. When the results are not good, make it a teachable moment. Help the children realize what the other options were and the possible results of those options. Protecting children from consequences is detrimental to their social and psychological growth. Help children experience consequences, but let the children know you love and support them.
6. Provide moral standards for the children. Help them know what is right and what is wrong. Let children know what you expect from them. Keep in mind the child's stage of development and ability to reason. (In a religious setting, use Bible stories to show what can happen in a person's life if he or she makes decisions that honor God.)

Every adult who works with children wants them to grow to be responsible adults who love God and do what is right. Allowing children to make decisions and experience the results will guide them toward being confident and responsible adults.

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