

CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

Choice Giving 101: Teaching Responsibility & Decision Making—Session 6

- **Providing children with age-appropriate choices empowers children** by allowing them a measure of control over their circumstances.
 - Children who feel more empowered and “in control” are more capable of regulating their own behavior, a prerequisite for self-control.
 - Choices require that children tap into their inner resources, rather than relying on parents (external resources) to stop their behavior or solve the problem for them.
 - If parents always intervene, the child learns that “Mom or Dad will stop me if I get out of hand” or “Mom or Dad will figure out a solution if I get in a jam.”
- **Presenting children with choices provides opportunities for decision making and problem solving.**
 - Through practice with choice making, children learn to accept responsibility for their choices and actions and learn they are competent and capable.
 - Choice giving facilitates the development of the child’s conscience; as children are allowed to learn from their mistakes, they learn to weigh decisions based on possible consequences.
- **Providing children with choices reduces power struggles** between parent and child and, importantly, preserves the child-parent relationship.
 - Both parent and child are empowered. Parent is responsible for, or in control of, providing parameters for choices. Children are responsible for, or in control of, their decision (within parent-determined parameters).

Choice-Giving Strategies

- **Provide age-appropriate choices** that are equally acceptable to the child and to you (parent). Remember that you must be willing to live with the choice the child makes.
- Don’t use choices to try and manipulate the child to do what you want by presenting one choice that you want the child to choose and a second choice that you know the child won’t like.
- **Provide little choices to little kids; big choices to big kids.** *Example: A 3-year-old can only handle choosing between two shirts or two food items. “Sasha, do you want to wear your red dress or your pink dress to school?” “Sasha, do you want an apple or orange with your lunch?”*

Choice Giving to Avoid Potential Problem Behavior and Power Struggles

- Choices can be used to *avoid a potential problem*. Similar to the example above, choices given are equally acceptable to parent and child. In this case, choices are planned in advance by the parent to avoid problems that the child has a history of struggling with. In the example above, if Sasha has trouble getting dressed in the morning, provide a choice of what to wear the evening before (to avoid a struggle the next morning); after she has made the choice, take the dress out of the closet, ready for morning.
- Children who are given the responsibility for making a decision are more likely to abide by the decision.
- In selecting choices to prevent problems, it is very important that parents understand the real problem that their child is struggling with and plan ahead to prevent the problem.
 - If your child always comes home hungry and wants something sweet, but you want him to have a healthy snack, plan ahead by having on hand at least two choices of healthy snacks that your child likes. Before he heads for the ice cream, say:

“Antonia, I bought grapes and cherries for snack; which would you like?”
 - If you know your 9-year-old child tends to head straight for the couch to watch TV after school, plan ahead to brainstorm alternative options for your child to do after school.

“Ana, I thought of some things we can do this afternoon before dinner. Do you want to go outside and play catch or help bake a cake for dessert tonight?”

Hint: This is another place where “structuring for success” can be applied by eliminating the majority of unacceptable snack items, instead stocking up on healthy snack items, and having acceptable activities planned when children arrive home. Structuring your home environment to minimize conflict allows both you and your child to feel more “in control.” Remember: **Be a thermostat!**