



More Choice – Less Struggle

Instead of frustrating power struggles with your kids, offer choices that include them in the decision-making process and encourage their independence. How about making it a resolution for the New Year – fewer power struggles, more choices!

More Choices – Fewer Power Struggles

Parents grow weary of the arguments over matters big and small with their kids. Instead of telling them what to do, giving choices to kids helps them learn responsible decision-making and keeps these encounters from becoming a battle of wills.

Some examples, according to age:

Child is whining and complaining as bedtime nears.

Don't say: "I'm tired of your whining and complaining, so you are going to have to go to bed now!"

Do say: "You can go to bed now ... or stop the whining and complaining and watch one TV show before bed. What's your choice?"

Child doesn't want to share his toy.

Don't say: "Give that toy to your brother – you need to learn to share."

Do say: "You have a choice. Either stop playing with your toy now and give it to your brother to play with for 5 minutes ... or you can play with it for 5 more minutes and give it to him to play with for 10 minutes."

Child does not want to take a bath.

Don't say: "Take off your clothes right this minute and get into the tub!"

Do say: "You can either take your clothes off and get into the tub ... or I'm going to have to pull your clothes off and put you into the tub. This will probably make you upset. What's your choice?"

Child wants an inappropriate T-shirt.

Don't say: "You can't buy that shirt – you'll look like a hoodlum wearing that!"

Do say: "I'm sorry you cannot have that shirt. The choice is that you can get no shirt ... or pick out another one."

Child's room is a mess.

Don't say: "Your room is such a mess, forget about going out with your friends this weekend!"

Do say: "Your room is very messy. You can clean it now and go out tonight ... or you can clean it later, and stay home tonight."

Tips:

- Make up your mind in advance to keep it brief. Don't allow your kid to keep arguing or restating the obvious – and refrain from lectures yourself.
- Stick to your original choices – don't let your kid suggest others.
- Giving in just to end the struggle sends the wrong message – and leads to even more arguing the next time!
- When offering the choices, it can be helpful to ask: "What do you think would be the best choice for you?"