

Tips to Help Children Make Good Choices

Parenting can be very difficult at times, especially when children make decisions that parents disagree with. If a child makes an unwise choice, it doesn't mean the parent is a failure or the child will continue making unhealthy choices. Following are tips for parents on how to successfully help their children make smart decisions.

- Love is the center of effective parenting. Fathers and mothers both have what it takes to be effective parents.
- Make the time you spend with your children count. Read with them, play games with them, shop with them. Provide opportunities and moments when you are with them and there are opportunities to talk and especially discuss difficult topics.
- Allow your children to learn from their mistakes when the “prices” are affordable. Provide opportunities for them to make choices, Avoid protecting your children from natural consequences, allow them to learn from their choices.
- Teach your children how to set goals and solve problems instead of doing it for them. Set limits on behavior while helping them find solutions.
- Be honest and specific when praising and encouraging your child.
- Be aware of your children’s emotions, and help them label their emotions. Avoid telling your child how he or she should feel. What may not be emotional to you may be really hard on your child.
- Keep calm if your child comes to you with a serious problem. Be supportive, empathetic and let them learn from their choices.
- Be aware of your own emotions and recognize when you need to take a time out. Remember, it is okay to take time for yourself.
- Model the words, actions and behaviors you expect from your child.
- Responsibility cannot be taught; it must be “caught and learned” by providing opportunities for children to be responsible. Begin small and add responsibilities.
- Use thinking words instead of fighting words. Fighting words: “Don’t talk to me like that.” Thinking words such as: “You sound upset, I will be glad to listen to you when your voice is calm.
- Avoid “siding with the enemy” and communicate understanding.
- Offer your child choices. For example: Betty would you rather wear this red jacket or this green sweater. Don’t offer a choice to your child you are not willing to follow through one.
- Mean what you say and say what you mean. Also realizing what you mean, some children may not understand.

- Discipline doesn't always need to occur at the moment. It is okay to tell your child why the choice they made was wrong and let him or her know you need time to think about the best consequence.
- It takes a community along with parents to raise kids. There are many resources available to help including health organizations, churches, community services as well as family and friends.
- Remember, no parent is perfect. It takes time support and love.

Resource: Extension Utah State University; Foster Cline and Jim Fay, "Love and Logic Parenting."