

Giving Children Choices

Revised by TATS from Better Kid Care Program, Pennsylvania State University

Giving children choices helps them feel like they have some control over what they do. It's a step in development. Making positive choices is a skill that children will use for the rest of their lives. The key to giving children choices is to first decide what choices you will allow them to make.

Positive choices for children

A good way to start giving children choices is to select two or three things and let the child choose from them. These choices are easy to allow children to make:

- "Which book would you like to read?"
- "Do you want to use a blanket during naptime?"
- "Would you like to use crayons or paint today?"
- "Would you like a peanut butter sandwich or a cheese sandwich?"



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Sometimes it is difficult to keep all the children together in one activity such as a multi-step literacy or math lesson. These are good times to give children choices of alternate but similar activities. Examples of statements that offer choices are "Cara, you may sit quietly to listen to the story or go choose a book to look at on your own." "Juan, if you're finished eating, you may sit at the table to talk with your friends or go put a puzzle together." A key point in giving choices of activities is to offer activities that are related to the ongoing lessons, themes, or skills being addressed by the group. Children often behave better when they are given choices.

Offering choices is a productive way of supporting children who might be having difficulty with the skills involved in an activity or might need a sensory or movement break during lessons.

A key rule to remember is to give only choices that you can agree to. Offer choices only when the child will truly be allowed to choose.

Prepare to give choices

Giving children choices during the day may mean that you will need to make some changes.

Opportunities for Choice-making

- Toys the children play with each day are kept on low shelves, so the children can choose what they want.
- Times for free play time are set aside in the schedule of each day and children are encouraged and taught to make choices about centers and play scenarios.
- Provide books with a variety of themes and formats, such as board books and picture books.
- Encourage children to help plan activities for the day or week.
- Support children in helping to plan and set the table for snacks.
- It is vital to support various modes of communication to enable children to make their choices known.
- Support choice-making for all children by providing wait time and modeling for children who have not yet developed skills in making choices.



Reference:

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