

## Parenting Tips: Why is giving choice important?

One of the most lasting gifts a parent can give their child is encouragement in making decisions. When we do this we support our children in their journey towards independence.

Of course there will be times where parents need to make the decision and times when the decision will be negotiated, but there will also be many times when the child can choose.

There are two easy ways to help your child learn to make choices:

1. Involve them in choosing everyday things eg what to wear, what they want on their sandwich, what's for dinner
2. Ask for their input in family discussions where you can allow them to choose the outcome eg where to go for an outing, who to invite to a party

Use the word 'choice' with your children. 'Which do you choose?' 'What will your choice be?' Remember, when children are young, to limit choices to two to make their decision making easier. Older children will be able to cope with a wider range of choice. Remember too, don't offer your child choice if you are not prepared to follow through. Children need to know that their choice will occur.

Giving our kids choice has a couple of bonuses in addition to helping them make decisions and increasing their independence. Children will take more ownership of a situation if they have been involved in the decision and this helps them stick to the agreement. If you often battle with your child about getting them to do things giving choice can be an effective way to get results without the arguments. Such questions as: "Would you like to do it now or within the next half hour?" give the child decision making power instead of being told directly what to do.

The other wonderful bonus is of course children who are encouraged to make choices have a higher self esteem because they are included in family decision making and given chances to express their opinions. They see their point of view as being valued by their family and are more confident when facing new situations.

As you finish reading this article, ask yourself the question: "How can I give my child more choice in his/her life?"

If we parent keeping this question in mind, we will be raising our children to be experienced decision makers and independent thinkers. They will be more confident and able to meet the challenging decisions ahead. We might even reduce some of those every day battles along the way!