



Building Blocks

for Parents

Giving Choices to Children

Giving choices to children is important. It lets them know they are important; that what they say does make a difference. It makes them feel big.

Are you willing to accept your child's choice when you ask:

- What would you like to wear?
- What would you like to eat?
- Where would you like to go?
- What would you like to do?
- Would you like a babysitter tonight?

Have you ever found that after you have asked a child "Would you like to go to the grocery store with me?" your child has answered "No". You cannot accept this choice because meat is needed for supper and the child can't stay at home by himself. Probably the situation ended with you forcing the child to come along. This is just a typical example of how parents can fall into the trap of giving a choice when no choice really exists.

How would you feel if someone gave you a choice and then told you, you had no choice. Probably you would be angry. So is the child! The message the child received is "No one cares how I feel" or "It does not make any difference what I want to do."

If there is no choice, don't give a choice. Stop and think before you ask a question to determine if you are willing to accept any answer. If not, rephrase the question so that you can give the child a choice that you will be able to accept. Some examples might be:

- Would you like to wear the red outfit or the blue one?
- Would you like grape or orange koolaid?
- Would you prefer hot dogs or soup for lunch?

If you've already asked a question and your child has given an answer you cannot accept, be positive. See if you can find a solution that is acceptable to both of you. The conversation might go like this:

Mom: "How would you like to go to the grocery store now?"

Child: "No, I'm playing."

Mom: "Gee, I do have to have the meat for supper, but I can wait fifteen minutes until you are through with what you are doing. I'll call you in fifteen minutes and we'll go then."

Child: "Okay!" The message you relate to your child in a conversation like that above is, "Mom cares about me!"

Giving choices to children is important. Some areas or choices can be choosing clothes to wear, a dish for supper, cereal when grocery shopping, birthday presents for friends, etc. Sometimes these choices are from a parent selected list. At other times there is freedom of choice such as "Choose a book you would like me to read to you" or "What game would you like daddy to play with you?"

Giving choices takes a little extra time. It involves thinking through a question before you ask it. It involves responding to your child's thoughts and ideas. The time spent pays off by helping build a positive relationship between you and your child.

Spec: 83-83; GA 9221-3/4/91

Distributed by Early ACCESS/Early Childhood Services, Grant Wood Area Education Agency, 4401 Sixth Street SW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52404-4499



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AREA EDUCATION AGENCY

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