

## let the kids decide: Nancy Zrymiak

Parents make decisions for their kids every day – from what to eat to where to go for an outing. What if kids got to have their say? Toddlers and preschoolers love to be included in decision-making. They will benefit from the independence that goes along with having choices and making their own decisions.

Raising a good decision maker starts early. A toddler can be overwhelmed with too many choices. Start with simple choices such as “It is snowing, do you want to wear your brown coat or the orange one?” or “Would you like apple or orange juice?” As kids get a little older you can give them bigger decisions to make. Let them choose what to wear or what activity to be involved in. Give kids choices and talk about the outcome of each choice. Encourage them to think about their options before they make a decision. But then respect the decision the child makes.

Children may not always make good decisions. What if 4-year-old Sara chooses not to wear a coat even after you have explained that it is cold outside? Let her decide. She may or may not complain that she is cold once she gets outside. If she does, let her go back and get her coat.

Sara does not need to be told, “I told you so,” or “You should have listened to me.” She will have learned that when it is cold she needs her coat. Never ridicule a child for making a decision that they later regret. It is important that children learn from their mistakes in a loving and supportive environment.

Here are some ways to include your toddler or preschooler in decision-making:

- **Allow your child to give some input at snack and mealtime.** What fruits and vegetables do they like? Do they want their sandwich in a bun or bread?
- **Let your child decide what to wear as often as possible.** Sure their clothes might be mismatched, but embrace their “style” and watch how they walk - proud and confident.
- **Let kids decide what books to take home from the library.** At story time, ask them what they want to read.
- **Whenever possible, include your child when planning activities:** “What game would you like to play?” or “Would you like to go to the park or the swimming pool?”

Learning to make decisions in the preschool years is important for self-esteem. A child who is used to being given choices and making their own decisions will not be as easily swayed by peer pressure. When you give your child the opportunity to learn decision-making skills you help them become independent thinkers as they move into the next stage of their lives: the school-age years.

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