

There are more behavior management techniques that foster children's healthy growth and development available than most parents could ever expect to use. But remember, a technique is only as good as the way it's used. When parents complain a technique is not working, it's obvious it's either the wrong technique, or a misuse of the right technique.

The following are some helpful techniques that you can add to your bundle of techniques already presented. These are some of our favorites my wife and I use with our three children. These are techniques proven to help children grow up healthy and caring. They're fun to use and they accomplish their goal.

Giving Children Choices

To help children utilize their power in a positive way, give them choices to make decisions on issues they view as important. Children will feel more powerful and use their power in a positive way because:

- Choices provide opportunities for children to use their power.
- Choices help children learn to manage their own behavior.
- Choices let children know they have power.
- Choices are a good way to defuse potential power struggles.
- Choices help children take responsibility for their behavior.



Giving children choices can begin early in a child's life. The following are some areas where choices can be given:

Dressing: *"Son, what shirt would you like to wear, your blue one or your green one?"*

Eating: *"Amy, would you like to drink your milk in a red cup or in a white cup?"*

Bath Time: *"Carson, do you want to play first and then take a bath, or take a bath first?"*

Play Time: *"Tommy, do you want to ride your bike or play with your trains?"*

Choices and Consequences

Providing children with choices for their behavior and consequences for those choices is another excellent technique in helping children manage their own behavior. When using Choices and Consequences, first share the options children have, and then the consequences for each of those options. Some examples:



"Children, you have a choice. If you continue to argue over the toys, both of you will lose the privilege of playing with them. If you share them and take turns like I expect, you can continue playing."

"Jenny, I expect you to use good table manners to eat your dinner at the table. If you continue to act silly, you will have to leave the table. It's your choice."

Some important points to remember when using Choices and Consequences:

- **Never use threats as choices.** Example - *"If you don't leave your sister alone, I'm gonna break your neck."* Parents either can't carry the threats through or don't want to.
- **Never give ultimatums as choices.** Example - *"I'll never talk to you again if you don't shut up!"* Ultimatums can rarely be carried through and soon children will learn your words are hot air.
- **Never give choices when there aren't any.** Example - *"Son, would you like to get your coat on now? We have to go!"* If the child answers, "No," but he really has to get his coat on anyway, he never really had a choice. Never give a choice when you cannot accept "No" as an answer.

Remember...Consequences must be related to the behavior you wish to increase or decrease.

Using Humor

Without a doubt, happy children are easier to be with, manage and encourage than children who are angry, resentful and oppositional. Humor is an outstanding strategy to help children learn to manage their own behavior, as well as an effective way to prevent arguments, rebellious behavior, and power struggles.

Did you know that by using humor you also help your child develop their sense of humor? Children begin to develop a sense of humor when they're very young. In fact, some researchers claim that a child's sense of humor develops before they begin talking. The game, "Peek-a-Boo" is a good example. Children laugh and laugh when a face appears. And it is well known that laughter and a sense of humor are great ways to relieve stress.



The following techniques demonstrate when humor can be put to use in parenting children:



Fooler Approach

Ever try to fool someone? Well, this can be a great way to get children to do things they're supposed to do. The first step in the fooler approach is education. Teach your child what it is you want. *"Christie, when I say I want you to set the table, I need you to put the plates, cups, and silverware on the table like this."* (Demonstrate what you want).

The second step is to give them a non-example. This is where the fooler approach comes in: *"But, I bet I can fool you. When I say, 'Christie, please set the table,' I expect the table to be set like this"* (give a non-example - silverware in the cups, or plates turned upside down, etc.) *"Is this what I want?"* The child will obviously say, *"Nooo Daddy! This is what you want,"* and she goes about doing it the right way. The fooler approach is a fun way to teach and get cooperation. It's also a great stress reducer.

Reverse Psychology

Another technique to help children accomplish a task is reverse psychology. The object is to say exactly what you don't want, but mean exactly what you do want. A father attempting to get children to the supper table says, *"All right, food is on the table, but I don't want any of you here watching television to come join us. You guys stay right there."* The children, knowing it's a game, race to the table ahead of Dad.

Talking Objects

Talking bathtubs, ice cream bars, shoes, etc. are all helpful in getting children to cooperate. A shoe that says, *"Put me on, put me on!"* is much more exciting than a parent telling a child, "Put on your shoes." A bathtub calling a child to jump in is more fun than a parent telling a child to get in the bathtub.



"Karen, you can read for five more minutes and then it's time for supper."

Transition Time

Providing children with a transition time between activities and before requests is important. No one likes to be told that they have to do something immediately. Mentioning to children, "Five more minutes and it will be time to eat," helps children prepare to make the transition from what they are doing to what you want them to do.

Asking, "What can I do instead?"

So many times parents are asked to solve a problem or to remedy a situation. While we parents certainly give our two cents worth, a better way would be to empower your children to come up with their own solutions. "Well sweetie, what can you do instead?" Encourage several solutions and both of you pick out the best one or two. If you're stuck on which one to do, identify the positives and the negatives to each solution. The one with the most positives is generally the better solution.

**Asking, "What have I learned?"**

Making mistakes is one thing - learning from them is another. Asking, "What have you learned?" from both successes and failures is a powerful way to empower children with insights. Let them tell you and sit back in amazement.

