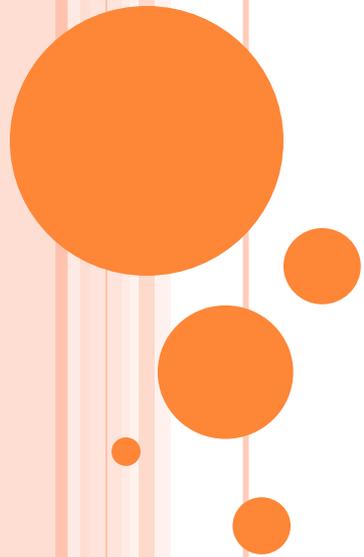


Fairfax County



Office for Children

POSITIVE GUIDANCE: REALISTIC CHOICES



Positive guidance techniques help children develop control of their own behaviors.

This means that children do not have to constantly rely on adults to remind them what is appropriate and how to be successful.

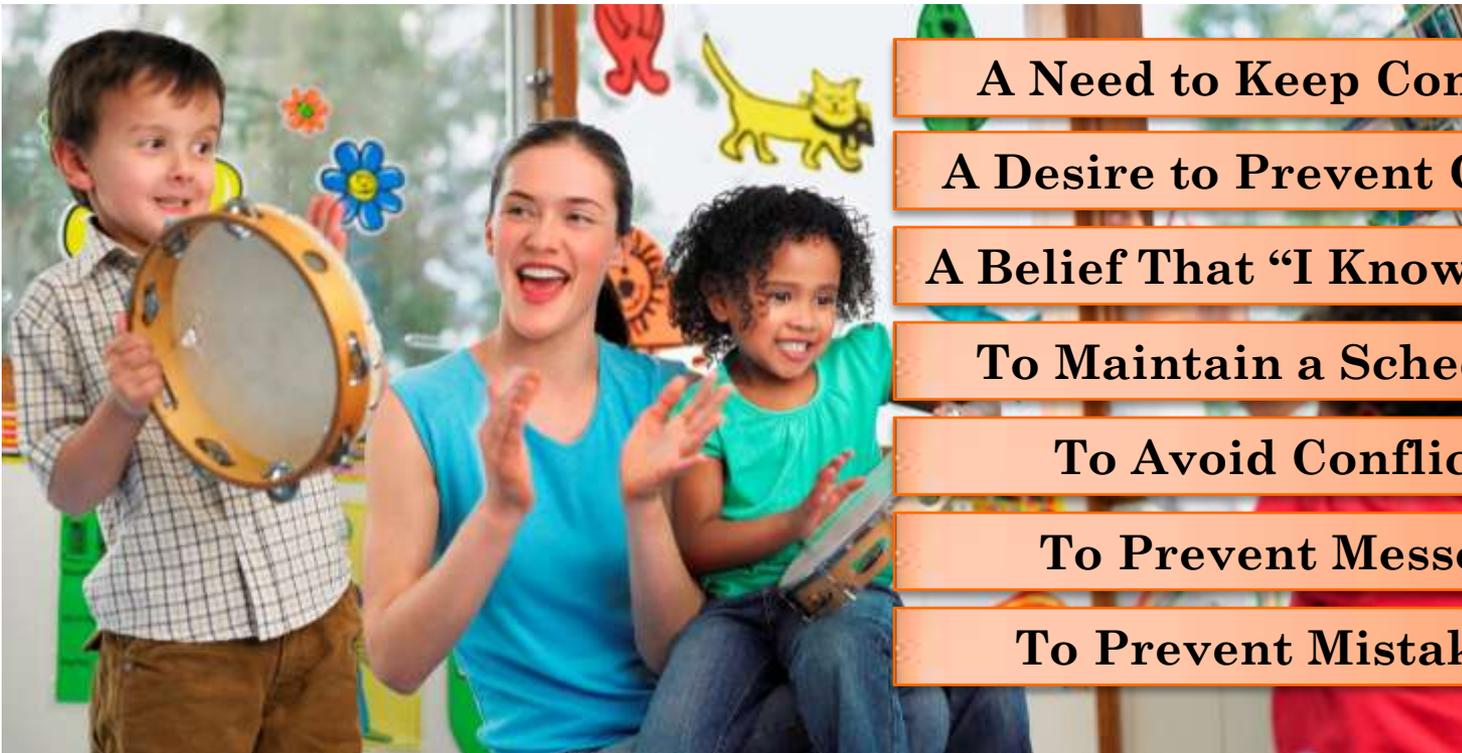


AN IMPORTANT PART OF GROWING UP IS LEARNING TO MAKE CHOICES.

Learning to Make Choices is a Critical Life Skill



Why might it be difficult for (some) adults to give children choices or to involve children in decision-making processes?



A Need to Keep Control

A Desire to Prevent Chaos

A Belief That “I Know Best”

To Maintain a Schedule

To Avoid Conflict

To Prevent Messes

To Prevent Mistakes

**What types of decisions
(choices) are not appropriate
for children to make?**

Safety

Health

Routines



SOMETIMES, WE CANNOT GIVE CHILDREN A CHOICE.

There are times when adults need to make choices for children.



What types of basic decisions (choices) can adults allow children to make?



In Which Area to Play

What Materials to Use

What Friend(s) to Play With

When to Ask for Help

When to Play Alone

When to Use the Bathroom

When They are Hungry or Thirsty

How Much They Need to Eat or Drink

Why is giving children choices helpful – a good thing to do?



It allows children to be in control of a part of their lives.

The opportunity to practice making choices helps children develop responsibility, cooperation and independence.

Why is it important for children to have the opportunity to practice making choices?



Learning to Make Choices is a Critical Life Skill

Why are children more cooperative if they are involved in making choices - involved in making decisions?



Making choices allows children to be in control of a part of their lives.

The opportunity to practice making choices helps children develop responsibility, cooperation and independence.

Children need the opportunity to learn to make choices – choices that are safe – choices that help children to be successful.

Making choices helps prepare children for life.



When we give children choices, we must offer them “real” choices.

A “real” choice is one that we can accept – a decision that we will honor.

What are some choices that we frequently hear given to children that are **NOT** real choices?

Do you want to clean up?

Do you want to take a nap?

Are you ready to go home?

Can you please share the toys?

It's time to put your coat on, okay?



Why are these usually **NOT** real choices?

Generally, we will not accept the choice that is made by the child if the response is, "No."

When we give children choices that are not real choices, it often creates confusion and power struggles.

Let's look at an example of this.



SCENARIO: It's cold outside – too cold to go out and play without a coat but not too cold to spend some time outdoors.

You say to Samantha, “We’re going outside. Can you put on your snowsuit, please?”

**Is this a “real” choice?
Why or why not?**



The choice we gave Samantha (“Can you put on your snowsuit, please?”) is not a real choice if the expectation is that she needs to wear her snowsuit to go outside.



Can you put your snowsuit on by yourself or would you like me to help you?

The choice we gave Samantha can be answered “yes” or “no,” however, if we are only willing to accept “yes” as an answer, this question can lead to a power struggle if she responds by saying, “No.”

Before giving a choice, it is important to make sure that the choices offered are acceptable to you.

Before offering a choice:

- **Clearly know your expectations.**
- **Clearly define how the child can be successful.**

What real choice could we give if we want to offer Samantha a chance to practice making a decision in this situation?

Why do we often give children choices that are not real?

This includes questions with “yes” or “no” answers (unless we are willing to accept both answers).

It also includes directions given with an “okay?” added at the end, which instantly makes it a “yes/no” question (and generally not a real choice).

We might do this out of **habit** (how we’ve always done it). We have an **expected answer** in mind – an answer we think is “right.”

We might do this because we think it will **avoid conflict** with the child – we think it is a nicer way to talk.

We might do this because we think it is **friendly**. Adults frequently do this with other adults.



Regardless of the reason, giving unreal choices confuses children.

We can help children develop responsibility, cooperation and independence by offering realistic choices – choices that are acceptable to us.

When we offer a real choice, we:

- **Accept the child's answer.**
- **Respect the child's decision.**
- **Honor the child's choice.**

We can offer simple choices so that children can practice making decisions.

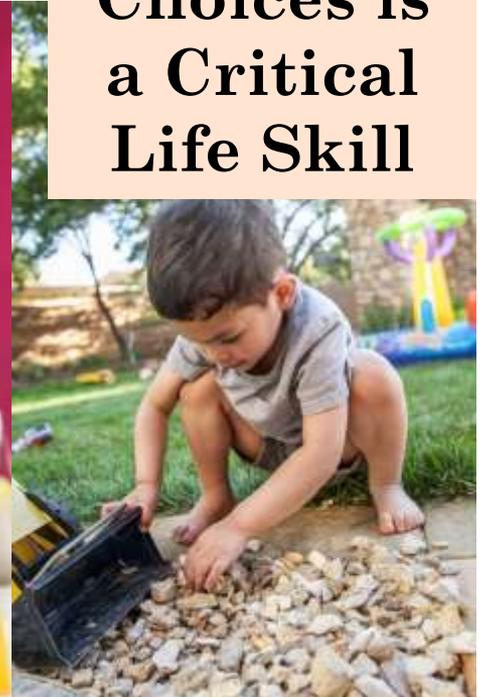
We can respect children's desire for control and our need to keep children safe.

We can guide children by giving real choices or, if no choice is available, we can offer simple statements and provide clear directions.



AN IMPORTANT PART OF GROWING UP IS LEARNING TO MAKE CHOICES.

**Learning
to Make
Choices is
a Critical
Life Skill**



**Let's practice creating REAL
CHOICES FOR CHILDREN!**

Let's rephrase each practice question into either:

- **A choice that we are willing to accept (a real choice).**

OR

- **A simple statement (a simple direction offering no choice).**

Remember that adding “OKAY?” to the end of a direction makes it a YES/NO choice.



Are you ready to practice?

Can you help clean up the toys?

It's clean up time. Would you like to put away the books or the baby dolls?

It's nap time, okay?

It's nap time. Would you like me to read a story or sing a song while you lie on your mat/cot?

Are you ready to go home?

If you are willing to give the child more time, then this would be a valid question because you could accept the answer, "no."

If not, you could say, "Would you like to put your coat on or would you like to hold your book bag so that you are ready to go home?"

Do you want to brush your teeth?

Would you like to use the sparkly toothpaste or the white toothpaste to brush your teeth?



Let's have lunch,
okay?

It's time for lunch. Would you like to put
the napkins or the cups on the table?

How many
crackers do you
want?

Would you like three or four crackers?

Will you put away your
sweater, please?

Can you put your sweater away by
yourself or would you like me to help
you?

Can you hold my hand so we
can go for a walk?

Would you like to hold this hand
(indicate one hand) or this hand
(indicate the other hand) while
we go for a walk?



A great way to create decision-making opportunities is by offering choices during routine times of the day.

This allows children to practice making choices during a time when expectations are clearly defined and the routine is familiar to them (they already know how to be successful).



What **real choices** can you offer to the children in your care during routine times of the day?