

Parent Education Conscious Discipline

Conscious Discipline is an evidence-based program that helps us understand internal brain/body states in relation to discipline and learning.

Week Three: Choices

The Power of Free Will is the belief that each and every person has the inner power to choose helpful or hurtful actions at any given time. Each of us is responsible for the way we behave. On the flip side of this, we cannot make others behave in certain ways; they must choose for themselves.

Free will applies to children as much as it applies to adults, yet we spend a lot of time trying to make children behave! It is time to stop forcing our will on children and shift from “how can I make children behave a certain way,” to “how can I help children choose to behave a certain way.”

Week Three: Choices

When we honor children's free will, choices become a natural tool to use. Young children have very little choice in their lives. Adults are constantly guiding them in what they can and can't do, can and can't wear, can and can't eat, can and can't play.

Choices help children increase their attention span, develop decision-making skills, follow through on tasks, improved their self-esteem, develop responsibility and feel empowered.

“You have a choice. You may _____ or _____. “Which is better for you?”
Two positive choices are pretty simple to offer; it's making sure they are both positive that can be tricky.

Week Three: Choices

We often say things like, “let your sister swing or we’re all leaving the park!” That’s a positive choice and a punishment, which is basically a manipulation. Children may comply in fear of the punishment, but they are going to miss out on all the benefits of making a choice - increased attention, follow-through, self-esteem, and responsibility.

Two positive choices require two favorable outcomes. In other words, we need to pick two choices we can live with.

Week Three: Choices

Hesitant to choose:

Point out all the small choices these children make throughout the day, create small, simple opportunities for choice and offer authentic praise through noticing when they make a choice. “You have a choice! You can hold my right hand or my left hand while we cross the street. Which do you choose? - You did it! You chose my right hand!”

Week Three: Choices

Resisting structure:

Developmentally, it is a child's job to test limits. Testing limits is how they establish themselves as individuals. Use the parroting technique to avoid entering a power struggle with children who resist structure. Parroting involves repeating the two choices calmly. The child's behavior will often get bigger and louder; your job is to remain calm. When the child complies, celebrate lavishly! If the child refuses, say, "You're having a hard time choosing; I will choose for you," and move on.

Week Three: Choices

Challenging their minds:

Children who change their minds are often stressed, but sometimes it is a learned behavior. Take extra steps to calm and connect with these children. Notice when they make a choice and stick with it. When they change their minds, say, “You chose the markers and here they are. You can color with them or not.” “You chose the pretzels and here they are. You can eat them or not.”

You have a choice. You may _____ or _____. Which is better for you?