

5 Tips for Parenting a Stubborn Child

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Parenting a strong-willed child can be challenging at times. But here's what experts recommend to help your relationship with your kid thrive.

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March 26, 2021

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My toddler's voice ricochets off the walls of the mudroom—*mama can't do it; mama can't do it* she repeats over and over. She's insistent on putting her yellow rain boots on herself even though they keep ending up on the wrong feet. In moments like these, a thousand images rush through my head as I imagine all the scenarios I'll encounter with my strong-willed child as she grows.

She lives every moment fiercely determined, and I love her for it even if I wanted to leave the house 10 minutes ago.

Parenting a stubborn child like mine requires patience, calmness, and stability. Here are five tips to teaching compromise and finding balance when parenting stubborn children.

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Give Choices

Kids with a stubborn nature like to be in charge of themselves. Give them plenty of opportunities to have authority over their own lives. "Let them make choices that don't matter in the grand scheme of things, like what to wear, which color of cup to use, or which swing to use at the park," says [Holly Nordenberg](#), a parenting coach based in Madison, Wisconsin.

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Parenting expert Lorie Anderson agrees. "You can't just, 'lay down the law' as it'll only cause them to get angry and more defiant," says Anderson, founder of [Mom Informed](#), a website providing guidance and resources to parents from the newborn phase up to teens.

But keep in mind, you can provide options that will lead to good decisions either way. For instance, when it's cold outside, I ask my daughter if she wants to wear a pink sweater or a blue sweater, so whatever she decides, she's going to end up wearing something that will keep her warm. I do the same thing when I ask her whether she wants blueberries or an orange as a snack—either way, she's eating fruit.

Slow Down

Sometimes "stubbornness" isn't really stubbornness. For example, maybe your child is being asked to do something they don't have the skills to do yet. Or perhaps they're overwhelmed by the environment and haven't yet learned how to cope with those emotions.

Take a deep breath, ask questions, and listen to what your child has to say. It may be the key to finding out what is hiding underneath their behavior.

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Set Expectations

While you want to let your kids be themselves and make individual choices on their own, you also have to set some rules. "The easiest way to enforce rules is by having a set routine—do homework right after school, bedtime at the same time every night," says Anderson. "They'll learn to go through the motions on their own and won't have you hovering over them, so they'll feel more independent."

Simply put, rules are a part of life and learning about them at home will help your child understand how to live within a community. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), rules help create structure and while kids will break rules from time to time, it's important to be consistent with consequences when they are broken.

As your child gets older, you can involve them more in the discussions of rules and limits, again giving them some authority over their own life and setting expectations so they will understand the reasoning behind them.

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Lead by Example

Ask yourself if you are practicing the skills and behavior you want your child to have and exhibit. If you respond with stubbornness during a frustrating situation, your child will likely only dig in their heels.

Instead, acknowledge their feelings, make sure they know their feelings are important and valid, help them find solutions, and practice calming techniques for when things don't go their way. "It takes patience and consistency, but these skills are invaluable, even at very young ages," says Nordenberg.

You want to practice calming techniques before your child is actually upset so they have a foundation to go back to. Ask your child to give you examples of times when they feel stressed and then what they can do help calm their body and mind down. You can offer suggestions like taking a walk together outside, or taking deep, slow breaths. It's helpful to have your child practice taking those deep, slow breaths so they know how to return to that when they are upset.

For younger kids, like my toddler, who are still learning about feelings I often ask how she is feeling at various times of the day. *Are you happy? Are you excited? Are you mad? Are you jealous? Are you sad?* Then when she is upset, I ask if she wants to talk about it. Sometimes she doesn't—that's OK—and I give her a few minutes but other times she's ready to talk about her feelings and then I can encourage her to find some solutions.

Remember, positive reinforcements, such as praise or a hug, can go a long way.

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Pick Your Battles

Some kids have to learn through experience. So, as much as you try to stop your strong-willed child from doing something, they might just go do it anyway.

"As a parent, it's your job to make sure they don't get too hurt, but you can still let them learn by doing instead of listening. They'll test the limits, but they'll also learn what happens when they do certain things, and that's good," says Anderson.

She suggests giving warnings instead of directions. For instance, if you tell your kid to put up their hood because it's raining but they don't do it and get it wet, they'll begin to realize it's important to take your words into account.

"It's better to let them go through this process early on before they can put themselves into real danger," says Anderson.

The Bottom Line

Stubborn kids are decisive, passionate, and determined—beautiful traits. Their firm attitude can be challenging at times, but with patience and consistency, you can help your stubborn child grow into a resilient, independent, and free-thinking being. Don't be surprised when that stubbornness ends up being one of their best character traits.

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