

Choice Making

Providing opportunities for your child to make meaningful choices that impact his/her daily life is the first step toward fostering self-determination. We make meaningful choices when we select from a number of possibilities. Offering your child a range of choices in matters big and small can help your child discover his/her own preferences, interests, strengths, and learning styles. This knowledge can help your child build a fulfilling life that reflects his or her own dreams. As children practice making choices, they become better at it – they tend to make better, more realistic choices. As a result, they are more likely to succeed in school and in life after school.



What You Can Do:

- ◆ **In the early years:** For young children, the choices need to be simple and clearly defined. **Examples:** “grapes or apple?” “striped shirt or plain shirt?” “color or read a book with dad?”
- ◆ **In the middle years:** As children get older, the variety and number of choices should increase. Provide choices about food and clothing, social activities, family events, recreation, and methods of learning new information. Involve children and youth in educational, medical, and family decisions. **Examples:** “It is your turn to pick a movie...what shall we see?” “What outfit would you like to wear to school today?”
- ◆ **In the teen years:** Encourage your child to identify options and make choices at home, at school, and in the community. Discuss and help your child evaluate choices regarding free time, work, friendships, intimate relationships, finances, and the transition to adulthood. **Examples:** “Which do you think you would like better... working at the day care or the supermarket... why?” “What would you like to spend your money on?”

What Research Tells Us:

Choice-making helps children with disabilities become more self-reliant and builds self-esteem. It fosters creativity, exploration, and imagination. The degree to which children experience choice-making influences their quality of life.

Children often see their own potential through the vision created by their parents. Offering as many different options and opportunities as possible helps children identify their unique strengths, abilities, and talents.

Children with disabilities are presented with fewer opportunities to make choices than their typically developing peers. Parents can offset this difference by offering realistic, meaningful choices that allow children to experience the outcome of the choices they make.