

SAMVEDANA

Empower Your Children To Make Good Decisions

Making choices is an important part of everyday living. From the moment we become conscious human beings we choose how to respond and with whom to interact. The need to make our own decisions increases as we grow and mature. Our self-awareness, self-esteem, locus of control (that is, the ability to be in charge of our feelings) all impact upon these choices and the ways in which they are made.

We need to develop internal control alongside the ability to use both brain (what we know is the right thing to do) and feelings (what we would like to do) to make a choice, recognizing and preventing impulsive responses when they are not helpful.

We must develop our ability to think ahead. When we identify consequences of actions we stand a good chance of making a good choice and achieving the best possible outcome.

We must try to:

- help young children to develop internal control in order to make good choices and to develop and sustain positive behavior.
- help them to understand the consequences of their behaviour and how their feelings and thoughts impact upon what they do.
- help them to become aware of the differences between thinking, feeling and behaving and the ways in which they can distinguish between responses based on thoughts or feelings and the majority of responses which are based on both.
- help them to distinguish between impulsive responses and well thought-out responses which allow for good and positive outcomes.

Using stories

With young children, this can most easily be done through a story. Stories are a vital resource; they provide a safe medium in which we can explore different kinds of behaviour and look at the consequences of actions. Stories provide situations where children can both identify and reflect upon good and negative choices and the outcomes that will result from both.

After reading a story right through go back to a place where a choice had to be made and ask the children what they think the character should do. As the story progresses, look at the options – what choice did the character feel inside

them was the one they wanted to make; which, in their head, did they know was the right one. Talk to the children about what could have happened if one or other choice is made – actions have outcomes and this can be gently pointed out in story.

Discussing choices in traditional children's stories

Red Riding Hood

Mother told her to be careful, not to talk to strangers. She knows, in her heart that she should not talk to the wolf but has either forgotten this good advice or is persuaded by the wolf that he is a kindly person. When she sees him in the wood she has two choices. Her head tells her that she should ignore him and go swiftly to her grandmother's house. But she stops to talk to him. Ask the children why they think she does this. Is it her head telling her to stop and talk – or is it her feelings – was she thinking and remembering what her mother had said? What kind of ending would this story have had if Red Riding Hood had ignored the wolf.

The three little pigs

These pigs have a different choice to make. Did the one who chose to make a straw house really use his brain to make that choice? What happened to him because he made the wrong choice?

Why did the third one choose to make a house of brick? Why didn't they all make a house of brick? What would have happened then?

The three bears

Goldilocks comes to the bears' house. She has a choice to make. She goes inside. Did she make that choice with her head, her feelings or both? What would have happened if she had waited outside for the bears to come back from their walk? Having made the wrong choice, not all is lost – until she sits in the chair and breaks it. What could she have done then? Perhaps waited until the bears came back and offered to try to get it mended. If she had made that choice, would it have been made with her head or her feelings – or both?

She could have stopped at any part of her exploration of the house but instead it all keeps going wrong. When the bears came back there was yet another choice to make – perhaps she could have had the courage to explain, apologise and try to make amends.

Cinderella

She made a choice at the prince's ball. When the clock bells started to ring she chose to run. How would the story have ended if she had stayed and talked to the prince, explaining where she came from and why her clothes had turned to

rags and how she had come to be at the ball? Do the children think that would have been a good choice?

As a parent, you and your child will both benefit by doing these things:

- **Encourage humor and laughter**
- **Acknowledge feelings**
- **Ask questions**
- **Share empowered moments**
- **Talk through the steps to solutions**

Encouraging humor and laughter

Nurture good humor by using phrases like:

- Gosh you have a great sense of humor.
- I like the way you laugh at things.
- I'm glad you don't take life too seriously.

Acknowledging feelings

Kids learn discernment when they feel safe to express feelings. You help when you encourage them to move through fear rather than letting fears freeze their actions.

Keep in mind these two words: recognize and respect. That means remember to recognize the feelings your children experience and respect them as genuine. This validates what they feel without sympathizing, correcting, or judging them. Also use music and deep breathing as ways to help them get calm.

Encouraging questions

I read somewhere that a thirty-something mother took her three-year-old daughter shopping up and down the aisles. She gave her daughter continuous feedback while they shopped. When something caught the girl's eye, she would ask to see it. The mother gave it to her and briefly explained what it was. She would ask her mother: "Is it good for me?" "Is there sugar in it?" "Will Daddy like it?" I noticed they didn't purchase things with sugar and saw how the little girl took delight in getting something for her father.

By having freedom to make decisions (and mistakes) about her food, this little girl learned a lot from a simple shopping trip. We should admire the mother for empowering her daughter to choose at such an early age.

Sharing empowered moments

Actively teach your child to honor the moments of empowerment as they experience them. Cheer when your children make a great game play. Savor the moment when they show you high grades by giving hugs. When they've done a

good job, show them how to cherish special moments by saying, "Close your eyes and remember this event. It is one of the great ones."

Most important, look into your child's eyes with sincerity when you say, "I love you."

Talking through the steps to solutions

Talking helps children to think and reflect. Encourage this fully.

The outcome!

Feeling of pride.

Don't buy into the belief that children only mimic their parents' actions. Empowered parents and children both know that's not a given fact. Parents do and children learn.

Feel proud seeing your own children stand tall. Look back and feel, that together, we handled each situation with respect and reflection. We helped them believe in their own ability to make good decisions. They made us feel proud.

That's empowerment.

Happy Parenting!

ANUPAMA CHAND
