

When you let your child make decisions – or contribute to family decisions – you also recognise your child’s right and ability to have a say in their own lives. Making decisions is an important way for your child to take responsibility and to become independent.

Giving children real choices gives them some control over what they do. Offer a baby two rattles and they will reach for the one that attracts them most. If they push a plate away it means they’ve had enough to eat for now! If a baby turns their head away, they no longer want to play peek-a-boo.

Making choices is an important step in growing up and builds confidence and self-esteem. It can even minimise conflict and lead to greater motivation because your child is involved in experiences that they have chosen.

If your child attends a high-quality early education and care service, you will have seen the educators letting your child make decisions or offering your child choices. They are helping your child to build a strong sense of identity and wellbeing.

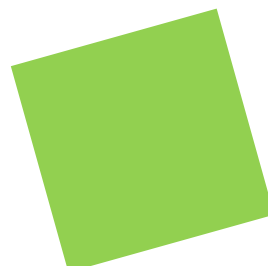
This doesn’t mean that you put your child in charge of running the family home, and it doesn’t mean

that you leave all decision making to them.

They will need the guidance and help of a trusted adult for many years to come.

What can I do to support my child’s decision making?

- Younger children manage better if they can choose between fixed options. Offer two toys to a baby and let them choose the one they want. With toddlers, ask: *Which book will we read before bed? Do you want bubbles in the bath tonight? Do you want to walk, or to ride in the stroller?*
- As your children grow, you can expand the number of choices you give them and involve them in more important decisions: *Will we go to the park today or stay home and do some cooking? Who will we invite over to play today, Flavia or Jon?*
- Only offer choices that are real. Don’t ask: *Would you like to have lunch now?* if what you really mean is *‘Come and have lunch now.’*
- Sometimes you will have to make a decision. Explain why, and perhaps offer another choice: *I can’t make you a sandwich now because we need to pick your brother up from school. You can eat some fruit on the way. Would you like an apple or mandarin?*
- If your child is frustrated in their play, suggest a couple of choices or possible solutions, and discuss these options.
- Give your child time each day for free play. This gives them the opportunity to make choices about toys and experiences.
- Arrange things in the home so your child can make those choices. Put toys and books on low shelves. Sometimes offer your child a variety of foods to choose from (including foods they like).
- Help your child to explore options and consequences. If they normally play with three friends and decide to invite only two of them to a party, help your child to think about the effects on the friend (and themselves) of this decision.
- Remember: there will always be ‘no choice’ areas. They include not damaging other people’s things, not affecting someone else’s wellbeing and



situations where someone could get emotionally and/or physically hurt. For example: holding hands as you cross the road is not a choice but necessary to stay safe.

Related links

See Kids Matter's:

- [Helping young kids choose wisely](#)
- [Learning to make good decisions and solve problems in early childhood](#)

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- 'I can do it myself!' Encouraging your child to be independent
- Building your child's resilience
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