HELPING KIDS MAKE SMART CHOICES

Decision-making like anything requires practice.

Michael
Some children want to have a say about everything that involves them. They have no problem letting parents know what they want and how life should be. Other children will avoid making decisions and will happily sit back and follow the lead of others in anything from fashion to food eaten at dinner.

Most parents these days are keen to involve children in family decision-making processes. It is smart management to get children’s input as they are more likely to stick to decisions when they have had a say.

It is challenging for parents to know when to make decisions for children and when to stand back and allow them to decide. Decision-making in families is broken into three areas:

1. **Parents Decide**: these are decisions where there is no negotiation. e.g. going to school, bedtime (at certain ages), mealtimes.
2. **Work things out together**: these are areas where you and your child negotiate outcomes. e.g. when to come home from an outing, TV programs.
3. **Kids Choose**: give your children full authority within reason in some areas. e.g. choose the sport they play, school activities, clothing

Each of these areas will vary according to parental values, the age of children and even individual temperament. Some kids want a full say in everything and need to learn that not everything goes their way. Others don’t want to make a decision for fear of making a poor choice. Both can be exasperating for parents.

Regular family meetings or get togethers provide terrific forums for parents and children to **work things out together**. Outcomes are best negotiated in formal settings that ensure sufficient consideration is given.

**Reward responsibility with greater freedom to choose**

As children grow and show the ability to make sensible decisions allow them more authority over their lives. Increasing independence involves greater freedom to choose, which demonstrates trust and faith in their ability to make good decisions. But greater freedom to choose needs to be accompanied by an increase in responsibility and also a willingness for them to experience the consequences of
their decisions. Grounding a child for being late home or removing rights to use a computer for a day if they overuse it maybe the best way to remind kids that they have made poor choices! These consequences need to be seen as learning opportunities not as punishments.

All decisions that children make have a consequence – whether positive or negative. A child can use the following three questions to help him or herself assess consequences of a decision they may make. This is a particularly useful guide as kids move into adolescence:

- Is this behaviour safe for me?
- Is this behaviour fair to others?
- Is this behaviour smart and in my long-term best interests?

Children often can’t see the long-term consequences of their decisions so it’s useful to give them information to help them make smart choices.

Also some children leap before they look. They need to be reminded to slow down and consider some of the possible consequences of their actions.

Michael Gross- Parenting Ideas