



WHY IS CHOICE-MAKING IMPORTANT FOR YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE?

Making choices lays the groundwork for helping your child make decisions as an adult. This may feel far off, but the things you do now are setting your child up for more control and independence as an adult. This leads to the best and most self-determined life possible.

Making choices helps build self-confidence and a positive self-image. Giving choices to young children with disabilities, as you would with any other child, lets them make these same positive gains as their typically-developing peers. The difference is that you will need to practice choice-making in a more planned way with a child who has a disability.



GETTING STARTED

Step Back and Let Go a Little

As a parent there is nothing more satisfying than seeing your child learn new skills, build confidence and have a sense of pride. By giving your child the opportunity to make their own choices in life, you are supporting them to grow.

You may need to step back, be patient and give up a bit of control to start this growth in your child. This means letting your child struggle occasionally and allowing choices that you would not make. Honor that your child is a unique and complex person with a variety of interests and needs.



Notice How and When Your Child Makes Choices

- Is it hard for your child to make choices?
- Does your child need extra time to process these choices?
- Is it easier to choose if your child has visual cues, verbal cues or both?
- How does your child communicate choices to you and others?



Finding the Right Time to Practice

- Are there times at home that are more relaxed, and when there is more time and space to make choices? It's probably best to practice when your child is not hungry, tired or distracted.
- Start in a safe environment that feels free of judgment. Try starting at home and work your way up to practicing out in the community.
- Practice, practice, practice. The more choices your child makes, the easier it becomes.

Find What Motivates Your Child

Focus on giving choices that matter! Observe what holds your child's interest and which things are important. This will make choice-making enjoyable and meaningful.

Only Offer Real Options

Give your child choices you can live with. Your child's choice may not be what you prefer, so make sure you are okay with it. Try not to set your child up for a "No." For example, if your child must go to bed at 8:30, don't ask what time they want to go to bed. Instead, ask which book to read before bed or which pajamas to wear.

Model Choice-Making

When you are making simple choices, think aloud to model, or show, how you're making choices. Talk through and explain your train of thought. For instance, at the grocery store, talk with your child about how you're choosing items. Or, when there's a bigger choice for your family, like where to go on vacation, weigh the different options aloud, and explain the pros and cons of each.

Start Small and Build

Start by **offering** a few options that don't have a long-term impact, like grapes or apple slices for lunch. Then work up to **choices** that let your child decide on something that will have longer-lasting consequences, like choosing which backpack or snow boots they will use this school year.

Take Care

It's always important to take care of yourself. One way to do this is to know that choice-making is a skill your child will learn throughout their life. You don't need to accomplish it all right now. And you don't need to set aside a lot of time to practice choice-making. Start small and build it into the routines you already do with your child, and watch your child grow.



Learn more on the Family Voices website's [Resource Library](#).

