



# Caregiver Interactions — What You Say Is Important!



## Power and Control

- ◆ The need for power and control (independence) is important in preschool development.
- ◆ From around two years old, children learn to distinguish themselves from their parents and the world around them.
- ◆ Children want to do things for themselves, make choices, exert power over people and situations, and declare ownership and authority.

## Child-Sized Decisions Are Important

- ◆ We want children to grow up to be thoughtful adults, to learn to make decisions, and to be confident individuals.
- ◆ By sharing control with children and helping them make “child-sized” choices, providers will help children begin to see themselves as able people.
- ◆ In our attempts to maintain control, we adults often set up unnecessary power struggles.
- ◆ Instead, adults can share control with children, making it a *win-win* situation for both the adult and the child.

## Share the Work!

Children love to help! Capitalize on this desire and share control by giving them “child-sized” jobs and tasks. These jobs help children feel important and help them contribute in important ways.

Think of “child-sized” jobs for the following situations:

Cleaning up lunch:

Grocery shopping:

Taking care of pets:

Doing laundry:

## Giving Children Choices

Many conflicts happen because children just want to have a say in what happens to them. Below, list the kinds of choices children are allowed to make while in your care:

## Two Types of Choices

There are two types of choices that providers give to children. It's important to understand what type of choice you are offering to a child.

### Free Choices

Free choices are open-ended statements that do not limit the possibilities of how a child might respond. Free choices can sometimes be difficult for very young children because the choice is too broad (too many possibilities). Free choices are best when the provider is willing to accept whatever the child chooses. Examples of free choices include:

*What do you want for breakfast?*

*What do you want to do outside?*

*What would you like to wear today?*

### Limited Choices

Limited choices allow children to pick from options given by the provider. These types of choices can be more appropriate for very young children. They are also more appropriate when the provider needs to have a certain outcome. Examples of limited choices include:

*Would you like grape juice or apple juice with breakfast?*

*Should we get out the bike and go for a walk around the block, or would you like to play in the backyard?*

*Would you like to put on your sweatshirt or your jacket before we go outside?*

## Say What You Mean

Sometimes providers may sound like they are giving children a choice when they really don't mean to. Giving children an inadvertent choice when you really mean to make a specific request is very confusing to children. This can often trigger unnecessary power struggles.

Instead, make your request direct and clear. Sometimes, you may want to include a limited choice in your request, so you can share control while still assuring that you'll get the outcome you need.

### **Inadvertent Choices**

*Why don't you go wash your hands for lunch?*

*Let's get ready for nap, OK?*

### **Clear Request With Limited Choice**

*It's time to wash your hands for lunch. Do you want one or two squirts of soap?*

*It's time to get ready for nap. Put your blanket on your mat.*

Providers can help children understand their requests by turning general, vague statements into smaller, specific tasks.

### **General**

*It's cleanup time.*

*Get ready for nap.*

*Eat your breakfast.*

*Pick up your toys.*

*Get ready to go to the park.*

### **Specific**

*Put the doll clothes in the container. Put the doll back in her crib.*

## Setting Positive Limits

*How many times have I told you not to . . . ?* Phrases like this don't help children know what **to do**, they just tell them what **not to do**. Instead, providers can always share what children should be doing.

Go through this list of negative statements and turn them into positive limits.

1. No throwing toys.
2. No running in the house.
3. Stop whining. You're driving me crazy!
4. Don't throw your food.
5. Stop making a mess.
6. Don't put that in your mouth.
7. Don't hit.
8. Don't grab that toy from him.