

Terrific Two's!

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Independence is a crucial stage in toddler development. Toddlers want to control the situation and make choices for themselves. Unfortunately, this often leads to a power struggle between parents and their toddlers. Try these tricks to maintain peace in the toddler world.

The Two Choice Game

Toddlers want to make their own choices; however, parents need to make decisions that keep them safe and healthy. Therefore, as often as possible, give the toddler two choices and let him/her control the situation by making their own choice. This works best if the choices are visual as well as auditory. Therefore, don't just ask, "Do you want raisins or cheese crackers for snack?" Hold the raisins and the cheese crackers out and ask the toddler to make a choice. "Which one do you want?" Toddlers, who are not yet able to verbally express their requests, can touch or point to their choice. If they have some functional words, such as "please" or "mine," you can encourage a verbalization, even if the "cheese cracker" was too difficult to say. Think of all the situations during the day that you can give your toddler power over his/her environment:

- Do you want to wear this green shirt or this red one?*
- Do you want to listen to your music or watch your movie?*
- Should we take teddy or dino to bed?*
- Do you want milk or juice?*

Beware of the Option Pitfall

We frequently make the mistake of asking a toddler a question when we do not intend to give them an option of "yes" or "no." For example, when it's bedtime and we intend to put our toddler to bed now but we ask, "Are you ready to go to bed now?" If your toddler answers, "No," you are stuck – after all, you did give the option. Give your toddler many opportunities to make decisions throughout the day. However, in the everyday life of a toddler, parents have to make some of the decisions. Giving a statement instead of a question may make a big difference.

Instead of:

- Are you ready for bed?
- Will you put these toys back in the bin?
- Don't you want to sit in your chair for dinner?

Try this:

- Five more minutes, and we go to bed.
- Time to pick up toys. Help me.
- You need to be in your chair. Can you climb up by yourself or should I help you?

