

MAKING WISE CHOICES

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Some time ago I had dinner with a good friend and her family. They had a nine-year-old son who decided to stand on a dining room chair at the dinner table while we were eating. The mother looked up at him and started pleading in a whining tone, "Daniel, will you please sit down and finish your dinner. You know you shouldn't be standing up there like that. Please?" I was astonished. What should have happened is this. The child should have been taught table manners as a 3 year-old.

When kids are given clear expectations, they know the consequences of not following them. Therefore, they are making the choice to be obedient or not. His choice was to stand on a chair at the table. Given he knew the consequences of his actions through previous training, all his mother needed to say was, "Daniel, you know your table manners. Get down immediately and leave the table. I will discuss this behavior with you when we have finished our dinner." (I suspect in this case Daniel wasn't taught good table manners at an early age)

As soon as a parent pleads with their child, the child is in control - they are calling the shots. This is not where a parent should be at any time in parent-child dynamics. We do not subscribe to the concept of 'the child-centered home'. We believe the home should be 'parent directed, family orientated and outward focused'.

I am also amazed at the amount of choice parents give their toddlers. In the market, I see a parent in the cereal aisle. They are handing the child boxes of cereal and saying, "Would you like this one, or this one, or this one, or this?" Children of this age don't need to be presented with any more than two choices at the most. Giving a child no choices is dangerous because they will eventually rebel. However, giving one of two choices to a very small child is adequate. When parents give children choices in everything from clothes to vacation locations, they often think they can choose in all areas of life. This is not the case. Life isn't like that.

Kids need to be taught how to make good choices. They should be given clear expectations from toddlers through to adulthood. They learn to make good choices by - a) parent role modeling, b) having the results of potential choices explained to them before they make decisions, c) being coached after making wrong choices, d) being praised for making good choices.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check

out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.