

Giving children choices

It would be remiss of practitioners to assume that the ability to make informed choices is something that comes easily to children. They need to be encouraged and supported in the decisions they make.

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IT IS amazing to think that a baby will start making choices from nine-months-old by pointing to something they want, or by accepting or declining food. For somebody so new to the world, the realisation that they can influence what happens must be amazing.

Encouraging young children to make choices enables them to take further steps in claiming some control and responsibility for their lives. Sometimes children exercise their emerging choice muscles by refusing to do as asked, or rebelling against an adult decision. Giving appropriate choices can help foster good behaviour by allowing them to have some control.

Too much choice can be overwhelming for a young child, so a choice of two options is a good place to start. Make sure that appropriate choices are offered.

A choice that is not really a choice, can lead to frustration. For example, 'an apple or an orange', rather than 'an apple or nothing.'

Using words to influence a child's choice also means that it is not really a choice. For example: 'Are you going to wear your red, or brown trousers?' Rather than: 'Are you going to wear your smart red trousers or your tatty old brown ones?'

Allowing some flexibility for choice, within the key activities of the day will give children confidence in their own decision making skills, and a sense of being heard and respected.

Praising them for choosing, and for the choice they made, will build their confidence in making decisions.

Vocabulary

During the following activities there is the opportunity to teach children vocabulary relating to choice. Ask which option they prefer. What others do they like? Which do they dislike? Which would they prefer; this one or that one? Use a variety of words, such as opt, select, decide, choose, either and or. Is it easy or hard to make their mind up?

My choice

Children learn acceptance by learning that their particular choice is one of a range of different choices made within a group.

Ask children to wear their favourite colour on a particular day and encourage them to look at the range of colours they have all chosen. On another day ask them to choose a toy or book, to bring in. Explain that the toy, book or colour that each one of them has chosen, is their particular choice.

Draw a horizontal line and divide it into rectangular blocks of different colours. Let each child choose the colour they prefer and put their name, or mark, underneath. Count how many children like each different colour. This can be repeated with shapes, animals or pictures of storybook characters. Encourage children to talk about their choices.

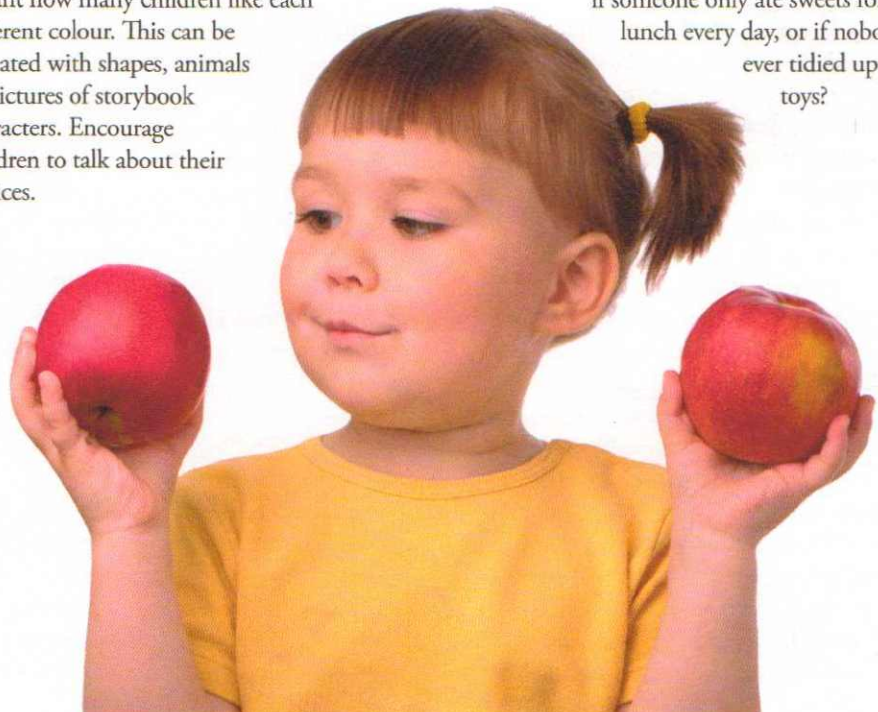
Display an object, such as a toy or picture and ask children what they like, and what they dislike about it. Encourage them to state their opinion rather than copying others. Point out the range of different opinions that exist within the group.

Choices during the day

Ask children to think of the different choices they make during the day. How many choose what they would like for breakfast? Who chooses what to wear? Which television programmes do they watch or what stories do they like to hear?

Collect pictures to represent children's activities during a typical day, such as getting dressed, eating a meal, watching television or listening to a story. Help them to sort them into two piles, one where there is some choice involved and one where there is no choice. Encourage them to discuss choices they make.

This is an ideal time to talk about the reasons why they cannot always choose, and the consequences of bad choices. For example, ask them what would happen if someone only ate sweets for lunch every day, or if nobody ever tidied up the toys?





Display a picture and ask children what they like, and dislike about it. Encourage them to state their opinion rather than copying others

Helping Teddy decide

Tell children that Teddy needs their help to decide whether to visit the seaside or the countryside. Make two columns on paper with a picture of each at the top.

Ask children to think of good reasons for visiting the seaside and put a star for each one. Do the same for the countryside. Ask if there are any bad things about visiting either of these and remove a star for each valid reason given. Ask them to count the stars to see where Teddy should go.

Use this technique for other hypothetical decisions, or for real group decisions, such as where to go on a day out, or choosing new equipment.

Creating my way

Instead of helping each child to make a particular model or craft item, allow them to choose from a range of materials, and colours, and create their own. Alternatively, display some different pictures to inspire them, for example, pictures; with a range of materials to choose from – help them copy, adapt or create as they please.

Food choices

Run a pizza-making session and let children choose toppings, from a variety on offer, or

let them choose from a selection of cooked vegetables to add to boiled rice.

Choosing games

Tell the children that you are going to call out a number between one and five, and that they have to get into a group of that number. Call out different numbers so that they can do this more than once. Make a rule that they have to choose children they have not been with before.

The Farmer's in His Den is a game about choosing other children – see www.landofnurseryrhymes.co.uk/html_pages/The%20Farmers%20In%20His%20Den.htm

Farmer Farmer

Children line up on one side of the room or area and a 'farmer' is chosen to stand on the other side. Children say: 'Farmer, farmer may

we cross your meadow?' The 'farmer' chooses a criteria, such as wearing red and children who fulfil this take a step forward. Whoever reaches the 'farmer' first is the next 'farmer'.

Hoopie hop off

Lay different coloured hoops on the ground, some distance apart from each other and play some music. Children dance around the hoops and when the music stops, stand in one. Roll a coloured dice, or write colours on slips of paper and draw one. Children standing in hoops of the corresponding colour are out.

Treasure hunt

Hide something in the sand and divide it into squares. Children take turns to choose a square and see if the object is buried there. Whoever finds it chooses where to bury it next. **eye**

Extensions

- Parachute games: Play parachute games, where children who fit specific criteria run underneath to swap places. Let children take turns to state their own criteria, for example, 'children with brown hair'
- Another parachute game involves letting a child choose who to send a cuddly toy to, while everyone else shakes the parachute to try to stop it arriving