



Empowering Your Kids to Choose

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My mom is a professor at California State University in Sacramento. In one of her freshman English classes she gave a student a 'C' on one of his papers. The student walked up to my mom after class holding out his cell phone and told her, "My mom wants to talk with you!"

Cut that umbilical cord! When is that kid every going to learn how to navigate life for himself?

Most parents care about their kids and want what's absolutely best for them, but many of us don't realize the best way to let them learn how to make good decisions... is by letting them make some decisions!

No, I'm not talking about letting your toddler drive the SUV to Toys R Us. Our toddlers obviously need a lot of guidance. But some parents don't have their eyes on the calendar. Someday our little baby is going to grow up and move out of the house. Are you equipping them for that day?

Here are four habits parents can practice to help their kids learn how to make decisions on their own.

1. Stimulate thinking

Parents should look for every opportunity to stimulate their kids' thinking and develop their decision-making skills. Simply said: look for teaching moments. If your daughter asks you how to respond to a friend at school who is gossiping about her, help your daughter think it through. Ask her a series of questions that stimulate her to process her feelings and possible responses:

How does this make you feel?

What might be a wise way to respond?

Sometimes the situation is a little stickier. "Dad, my friends are all going to Matt's house to watch that Seth Rogan movie and... well... hang out. I kind of wanted to go."

As an informed parent, you know that all Matt does is sit around his house smoking pot, and the movie they want to watch is about that very thing. But instead of overreacting, use this as an opportunity for interacting. "Tell me more about this."

It's amazing what you can learn when you are quiet and ask your kids to give us more information. Let them stumble over their words. Let them examine the situation in their minds. Then ask them more questions. Questions like:

What do you think the wise decision is?

What would you do if you were the parent?

No, they aren't always going to realize the folly of their ways. But give them a chance to think it through.

Jonathan McKee is the author of over a dozen books and the brains behind TheSource4Parents.com

2. Let them make the choice

This is where it gets more difficult. As parents, we need to let them experience decision-making, and sometimes, experience failure. Think about it, when they're 18-years-old they can move out of the house and do whatever they want. So we might as well start equipping them to experience decision-making while they're still in the safety of our shadow.

No, that doesn't mean you necessarily need to let your 15-year-old go to that party and spend the night with that friend from school. But you should let them begin making some choices, then talk about those choices.

“Dad, can I download this new app on my phone?”

Dialogue about the app, ask them what they think... and if it's not blatantly immoral... tell them, “You choose. Then tell me what you think later.” I promise, they'll be so happy you let them choose, they won't mind the dialogue. But then we need to learn to...

3. Get out of their way

In the business world this is the difference between “delegation” and “empowerment.” Delegation means they have to check with you first. Empowerment gives them the power to choose, then let you in on their decision. When our kids are young, we delegate. As they get older and more mature, we need to empower them.

If your 17-year-old is still asking you permission to do everything just 3 months before she leaves the home, when do you expect her to learn how to choose for herself? Do you want her first lone decision to be in a college dorm when some guy offers her a drink? That's often the case. A recent Rutgers study titled, *Freshman Women's Binge Drinking Tied to Sexual Assault Risk*, followed hundreds of young women who had never drunk heavily in high school (if at all).¹ Sadly, nearly half of these women admitted to binge drinking at least once by the end of their first college semester. Scariest yet, one in four of these women said they'd been sexually victimized in the fall semester, including anything from unwanted sexual contact to rape.

When do you want your kids to experience making their first decision?

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4. Notice something they did right

Once they make a decision, look for a way to affirm them.

Sometimes this is very difficult. “Well, I gotta admit, you look like you really tried to look in your side mirror before backing up into the neighbors Mercedes. We’ve all made mistakes.”

Catch your kids doing something right. “I heard you come in last night before 12:00. I just wanted to say thanks. Your mom really worries when you’re out past midnight. Thanks for being so responsible.”

When we affirm our kids for doing right, we not only bring light to wise decision-making, we help create a climate where our kids are encouraged to dialogue with us and think through decisions.

Are you helping your kids think through their choices and allowing them to make decisions on their own?

Time is short. Use the moments we have to teach our kids how to think wisely, responsibly and biblically for themselves.

1. <http://alcoholstudies.rutgers.edu/news/JSADpress/JSADJan2012.pdf>

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