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You **Choose!**

What if every waking moment of your day, someone told you exactly what you had to do? What if someone laid out your clothes for you every day, served you the same thing for breakfast, and told you when to get up and when to go to bed? Wouldn't you rebel? Similarly, children want to have choices about what they do.

Why offer choices to young children? Giving children choices helps them to:

- Become responsible, independent and autonomous human beings.

- Feel some control over their own lives.

- Increase their self-esteem.

- Learn to self-regulate, be more cooperative and decrease their conflicts with other children.

- Feel respected by the adults in their lives.

- Develop skills in problem-solving, thinking, communication and negotiation.

- Understand cause and effect.

How to give choices:

- Limit the choices and be specific ("Do you want Cheerios or crackers for snack?" not "What would you like for snack?").

- Offer choices that feel genuine to the child (instead of "Share your toy or go to time out," offer a choice of sharing or finding another toy).

THE PENNSYLVANIA KEY

EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS!

- Offer fun choices for something the child might not want to do ("Shall we skip or hop to your nap?").

- Make sure you will be happy with whatever the child chooses and accept the child's decision; don't ask, "Do you want to…" unless you're okay with a "no" answer.

- Help them accept the consequences of their choices.

- Provide suggestions and encouragement when a child is hesitant to make a choice.

- Don't offer choices when safety is at stake.

RESOURCES

Offering Children Choices: Encouraging Autonomy and Learning While Minimizing Conflicts By Sue Grossman Ph.D. **http://bit.ly/2pXGpr7**

Brief #15: Using Choice and Preference to Promote Improved Behavior by G. Dunlap, D. Liso. Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. **http://bit.ly/2AUVXhu**

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at **PAIECMH@pakeys.org** with questions or concerns.

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