

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD MAKE GOOD CHOICES?

One of the most common responses in the person-centred annual reviews on 'what's not working?' is about families struggling to help their child make good choices.

This is a key area of 'Learn to Live' and part of it is a 'good choices plan' so this is a starter to help.



What do we mean by good choices? It's about making a choice that is good for the child and the family. Choosing to throw things around so a window gets smashed would not be a good choice. Choosing to be outside on a warm sunny day and taking some exercise might be a good choice. Mind you, it might not be good if you are meant to be doing something else. The context is significant.

All of us are less likely to make good choices if we are tired or hungry. If a choice is important then it is best to wait until we are fresh and calm; it is very easy to rush into the wrong thing otherwise.

Things that will affect my choices are:

Do I feel secure? Am I in a familiar place with familiar people for example? When I am feeling anxious I sometimes need just telling what to do (say driving in a strange town) rather than given choices such as "shall we go the pretty way?"

Do I need to go to the toilet? If I feel constipated or am worried about wetting myself then that is all I can think about.

Have I had to make lots of decisions? Research shows the more decisions we have to make the less energy we have to be able to make decisions, meaning they are less likely to be good ones. Barack Obama wears the same outfit everyday so he does not waste precious energy on unimportant decisions.

If I state a preference, will you listen? If you ask me if I would like a chocolate or an orange and I say chocolate, might you then say, "actually it's near bedtime and you've had enough sweets today". I am likely to get cross if I am asked and then ignored.

Am I tired? I can hardly think straight when I am tired so please don't ask me to be sensible when I can hardly remember my name.

Am I hungry? I get very tetchy if not fed regularly. My blood sugar is down and it makes me grumpy. I feel much better if I have just eaten. Ask me to make important choices when I am nicely full; I will be much nicer.

Do you listen to me? How do I know? I know that you can't always do what I want but it is nice if you show that you have heard what I have said.

Ideally choices are made when we feel relaxed and refreshed. When we are not, other people may have to make choices for us in our best interests.

Definitions - There are levels of decision making and we use different levels depending on the circumstances.

1. State a **preference**: eg "Would you like orange or apple juice?"
2. Make a **choice**: eg "What would you like to drink?"
3. Make a **decision**: eg "I would like to drink coke but I know it makes me hyperactive so I will have water." None of us find good decisions easy.

