

How To Manage Conflicts With Your Children.



Do you and your children often get into conflicts that end up with one person being the winner and the other the loser? If so, you can be pretty certain that your whipping up a recipe for future disaster in your relationship with your child. You really don't want either party walking away feeling defeated, it's just not a healthy way of resolving issues. According to Laurence Steinberg in *The 10 Basic Principles of Good Parenting*, what you really want to shoot for is a way to settle your differences that both parties feel satisfied.

It's normal for parents and children to get into disputes. However, if you fight with your child more than once or twice a week, and those incidents almost always end in screaming matches or even physical aggression, you should seek professional help. This is not a normal level of dispute with your child.

When you do have the normal type of disputes that are bound to occur in parent-child relationships, you will ultimately have to choose from four different styles of resolution. You can:

•**Assert your parental authority.** This will allow you to end the argument in your favor, but it's not always the best choice. Your child will probably resent this tactic and see you as an unfair autocrat. There are times, when you feel your child could be in danger and you have the experience to know better than he or she does, when asserting your authority is absolutely the right thing to do. For instance, when your child refuses to wear his or her bicycle helmet.

•**Give into your child's wishes.** Facing that you are wrong about something is the right thing to do if you are wrong. Then it is appropriate to admit it and allow the child to do what he has asked to be allowed to do. Remember, unfair rules undermine your authority. Another time to give in is when something is trivial to you but really important to your child (for instance how your child might want to dress for a party).

•**Compromise.** This tactic can make sense as long as the compromise makes sense and leaves parents and child feeling

satisfied. So for instance, splitting the difference can make sense when your child does not want to practice and you strike a deal where he still has to practice his piano lessons but for only half the regular time. However, compromise is not always appropriate, so for instance if your child does not like peas, striking a deal where she only has to eat half of them probably will not leave her feeling satisfied.

•**Joint problem solving.** In this case, when you and your child disagree about a rule, you work together to come up with a new rule that is satisfactory to both of you. So if you have a child who is finicky eater and you want him to eat his vegetables, you could sit down and come up with a list of vegetables that your child agrees to eat, and you can agree to only prepare these vegetables for the child. It will be more work for you, but it will take less energy than repeating the same fight every night. This method is a good one in many cases, but some young children may lack the ability to reason that it requires. You have to be the judge.