

Helpful Tips...

from Jaymie Wakefield, Wade King School Counselor

Negotiating With Your Child

Begin with asking “Why?” Why is your child refusing to do this task? Is it outside of their ability or unreasonable? Is your child too emotional, overtired, or have another basic need that’s not met, which makes meeting this expectation difficult? Is your child feeling powerless, or needing connection?

Consider expected task demands and your child’s complaint. Sometimes, your child may have a legitimate complaint. Allow your child to feel their feelings and state their case. Listen with patience and aim to understand. When both parties feel heard and remain calm, negotiations are likely to be successful.

Ready to Negotiate? Carefully offer choices that you can agree to. Negotiate where you can. Maybe the task is non-negotiable (leaving the house for errands), allow choice within the task (by adding one fun stop like the library or the duck pond ,or choosing the sing-along song for the car ride), or by adding a special job (like crossing off completed errand stops from the list, or helping to carry groceries with their own right sized shopping bag).

Avoid bargaining statements. Instead of, “if you.....then I’ll....” Offer incentives as a choice question. “Would you like to stop at the library or at the duck pond once we’ve completed our errands?”

The Non-Negotiables

Some things can’t be negotiated. Safety first; you have instincts about what feels safe and appropriate and it is OK to stick to them! Offer your child your reasoning, “This one is not negotiable for me, I can’t support that idea and here is why...” When your child pushes hard against these non-negotiables, don’t get caught up in trying to convince him/her of your side. You might say, “I hear you, and I understand that you don’t like my answer. I understand that you are disappointed, and I won’t change my mind about this.”

When Negotiating “Fails”

Even with our best efforts, children can refuse to negotiate. This is when the big picture conversation about the refusal, versus the task being refused, is warranted. This is where you can challenge feelings about the task, “You seemed to feel agreeable about this last week, has something changed?” Talk through the time you did have a successful agreement, “Can we try this same approach that worked for us last week?” Recall a time it went well, ask your child why that time was different and what they might need this time to be successful. “What worked then? How do we do that again?”

The Negotiating Debate

Have you heard, “Never negotiate, be in charge?” Negotiating differs from bargaining. Done well, negotiating helps children gain skills in self-advocacy, responsibility, and expression of ideas. Building connections and building understanding of each other’s needs are byproducts of negotiating.

My Personal Example

Our two sons were given choice in the house jobs or “chores” they were responsible for. We would write all the chores down and the boys were allowed to identify one chore as one they did not want to do, ever. Then we negotiated the remainder of the chores, including parent jobs (which helped them gain insight to our part of maintaining the house). Through the years, we would revisit the house jobs and adjust as needed, always using a family meeting style. Our son was a Freshman in high school when he joined the track team and struggled to manage his daily demands of school, homework, track practice, and chores. To our surprise, and delight, he came to us with his need to renegotiate his house jobs. He even had a solution ready, stating, “Mom, with my school days so busy now I can’t keep up on chores. Can I trade you my daily chores (dishes and wiping down the kitchen) for some of your weekend jobs (dusting and mopping)?” He was able to verbalize his need, formulate a solution, and offer a fair negotiation. Don’t misunderstand me, it wasn’t always smooth negotiating, but this one was a win!

Siblings: Why can’t we just get along?

There are many theories as to why siblings bicker. Some family counselors see it as a form of communication, some suggest it is a way to connect, others suggest it is a way to seek parental favoritism.... Whatever the reason, it can sure exhaust a caregiver! The WHY is tricky to know. If siblings are bantering, it might be worth ignoring if it is their way of connecting.

Tattling versus Asking for Help

When children learn the difference between tattling and asking for help, the way they bring problems to you can improve dramatically. Ask your child if they are tattling or asking for help and remind them the difference. When tattling, their goal is get someone in trouble. When asking for help their goal is to solve a problem. When asking for help, it should include the problem, “I need help with...” what they have tried so far to problem solve on their own “I have tried...” and an idea on what might solve the problem “ I think....” Or “I would like....”

This will take practice! And you can model this for your child by saying, “I notice you dumped clean clothes out of the laundry basket to build a fort. I had planned to use that basket to carry the clothes into the bedroom. Can you help me refold the clothes and carry them to the bedroom please?”

Own Spaces, Favorite Toys, and Time with You

Everyone enjoys some “just me and my thoughts” time alone. Every child should have his/her own space to call their own. This doesn’t have to mean going to their own bedroom. My 7 year old niece designed her own reading corner in her closet when her little brother started to toddle around. That became her “Just for Sophie” space. Having a too-special-to-me-to-share toy is ok! Having some things off limits to siblings can help alleviate some sibling tensions. Having one-on-one time with a parent may also help ease tensions around sharing you and could lessen their need to seek attention through sibling squabbles.

It is time to intervene? Consider these tips:

Avoid taking sides. It is easy to become both the jury and judge as each child lays out his/her case. This may inadvertently increase tattling as children begin to compete for your agreement to their plight. Instead, invite your children to share their role in the disagreement, rather than what was “done” to them. Ask them child to argue each other’s point of view. This allows them to review their own behavior, recognize how they contributed to the problem, and gain the perspective of their sibling.

Make siblings a team and ask them to come up with solutions together. Change the language to include “their” dilemma and ask that “they” resolve this together. “How will you two solve this so you can enjoy your outside time together?”

Family Meetings for Problem Solving

At Wade King, we practice Classroom Meetings and we use Sound Discipline’s model for Problem Solving Meetings. Many parents find this format helpful for solving sibling upsets. Find more information about how to have a Family Meeting with this [link](#).

Thank You for spending this time here with me, and please know that I truly enjoy connecting with parents and caregivers. If you have any questions around behaviors or social-emotional well-being, or if I can connect you with district and community resources, please find me at (360) 746-5319 or feel free to [email](#) me.