



Would You Like an Apple or a Banana? Why Offering Toddlers Choices Is Important

"Would you like an apple or a banana?" Klaire's teacher asks. It is important to have a choice. It is especially important for Klaire to have a choice because Klaire is two. Why is it so important for a two year old to choose her snack? It is not particularly important whether Klaire chooses the apple or the banana. What is important is that she is given a real choice.

When a person is two there are many "you may nots." You may not: stay home alone, eat when you want, cross the street by yourself, lock the bathroom door, turn on the water, stay inside while the other children go outside, go to bed when you are ready, skip wearing boots, get yourself an aspirin, buy a guinea pig, or open the refrigerator. Because there are so many things a two year old may not be permitted to do simply because of safety or health precautions, it is difficult for two's to feel control in their lives. But this is exactly the time that a child needs to develop a sense of autonomy...a sense that he is an independent and competent individual in his own right.

Making Choices Is Important

One of the best ways to develop a sense of autonomy is to make choices. When we make our own choices we feel a sense of control. According to Erik Erikson (1963), two year olds need to feel a sense of control in order to develop healthy personalities. As they choose, they begin to walk the long road toward behavioral autonomy, which Sessa & Steinberg (1991) believe is important in learning to regulate one's own behavior. This teacher realizes that by giving Klaire authentic, limited choices, she is building Klaire's confidence in herself. Klaire feels in control by making choices like what type of snack she'll have. That growing sense of control reduces the child's need to try to gain control in negative ways. But those choices must be authentic.

What are Authentic Choices?

An authentic choice is real. The child's choice matters. If the child chooses the apple, we don't serve them the banana instead. When offering a child a choice, the adult needs to respect the child's decision. Don't ask, "Do you want to..." unless you are prepared for a "no" answer. Playtime is a perfect opportunity to offer children choices about what they will do, for how long, and with whom. Teachers who offer children the options of working in blocks, paint, puzzles, or dramatic play are taking advantage of using developmentally appropriate curriculum to build emotional competence.

Is it Practical to Offer Many Choices to Young Children? Won't They Become Overwhelmed?

Yes, toddlers can become overwhelmed by too many options. Choices need to be limited. Reasonable parameters need to be set. When the adult makes two or three suggestions from which the child may choose, we know that the child's choice can be honored.

How do Teachers and Parents Offer Choices to Toddlers?

While it may be easier for the adult to make a choice for the child, it is well worth the effort it takes to provide children with the opportunity to take pride in their ability to make independent choices. Look for opportunities in all of the everyday aspects of life. Can the child choose which pair of socks or shirt to wear when given a few options? Could the teacher offer a rainbow of colored paper at the art table? Could the children decide which songs to sing today?

What are the Other Benefits to Offering Children Choices?

The best way to learn to ride a bicycle is to ride one. The best way to learn to play a musical instrument is to practice. The best way to help children learn to make wise choices is to start early, when the choices are inconsequential. It does not matter much if we choose the apple or the banana. However, the opportunity to make that choice brings with it a most important life lesson. If we have the apple, we are stuck with the apple. We can't change our mind and exchange it for a banana. Our decisions have consequences. Children need to live with the consequences of their choices. That is how they will learn to think through their decisions and be prepared to live with their choices. If children learn to live with their decisions when they are small, and if they are given many, many opportunities to make choices as they are growing up, then it is more likely that they will be able to make wise decisions when they are older, when the consequences can bring repercussions much more serious than apple or banana. Practice can improve decision-making ability just as it can improve reading ability.

For the complete article visit:

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By Sandra Crosser Ph. D.

<http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article/view.aspx?ArticleID=691>



Valentine Marbled Salt Dough



Making the Dough

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup salt
- 3/4 cup warm water

Combine dry ingredients and then slowly add water, mixing until dough-like consistency.

Leave it natural and add color by painting ornaments or sculptures after they are dry, OR knead in some color.

Tip: If kneading in color before baking, use powdered tempera paint.

Cut out ornaments using heart cookie cutters.

Use a plastic drinking straw to poke two holes in each heart for threading.

Bake them for almost two hours on the lowest setting, flipping occasionally to keep both sides drying evenly and prevent browning.

ALLOW CHILDREN TO BE HANDS-ON AND ENGAGE THEM IN CONVERSATIONS THROUGHOUT THE ACTIVITY, CREATING A MEANINGFUL SENSORY EXPERIENCE!!!



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Shaken Painted Hearts



1. Container that can close up tightly
2. Cut some paper hearts out of construction/scrapbook paper (i.e. purple, pink, bright pink and red)
3. Double-side tape them to the inside bottom of the container
4. Dump in some random toys
5. Put a few blobs of washable paint in the container (not on the hearts though).
6. Close container tightly
7. Then... **shake shake shake!**

Additional Information

National Association for the Education of Young Children

<http://www.naeyc.org/>

Caring for Our Children

National Health and Safety Performance Standards Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs

<http://cfoc.nrckids.org/>

Texas Child Care

The Quarterly Journal for Caregivers Everywhere

<http://www.childcarequarterly.com/>

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