

## HELPING CHILDREN SUCCEED AT THINGS THEY'D RATHER NOT DO

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Most of the time, our children are happy and agreeable. That is possibly, until we ask them to do something they don't want to do. When we tell our children it's time to get ready, pick up their belongings, help with household chores, or complete some other undesirable task, we may see a totally different side of them. As parents, it is difficult to see our children transform from easy-going to difficult just because require something of them. Luckily, resistance to demands is not a foregone conclusion. This article will provide a set of tips, organized into a planning guide, to help children succeed at the things they would simply rather not do. First, the tips...

**Define behavior.** It is important to make sure that expectations are perfectly clear to children. Consider in advance exactly what you expect your child to do and how or how well it needs to be accomplished. Break long or complex tasks down into manageable steps.

**Arrange environment.** How surroundings are arranged can promote children's success in daily tasks. Organize space and materials so that all necessary supplies are on hand and distractions are removed. Schedule tasks at consistent times so they become a predictable part of routines.

**Present expectations.** The way we present expectations influences how children respond. Stop (or avoid starting) enjoyable activities before asking your child to begin activities they may not want to perform. Offer choices whenever possible, such as when tasks will be performed, the order of task completion and how exactly the tasks will be accomplished.

**Encourage success.** We should not assume that children know how to complete tasks. When in doubt, don't just tell – teach. Teach children to perform the skills by talking through expectations or showing them the actions necessary to finish. When needed, use visual cues, gestures, or physical assistance to guide them to complete complicated tasks.

**Reward progress.** Children are more cooperative when participation in tasks is followed by something they enjoy. Provide praise when your child is actively working and reward them by following tasks with preferred activities. Offering your assistance, as well as blending pleasant activities into tasks, can serve as rewards for good progress.

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**Correct errors.** Providing feedback and holding children accountable are essential to learning skills. Correct or restart tasks that are done incorrectly. Don't let your child off the hook as a result of whining or other bad behavior. If you give in to these behaviors, your child may be more inclined to behave badly the next time you ask him or her to do something.

#### Brushing Teeth

<b>Define Task:</b> Brush each area of mouth (front, back, top, bottom, side, side) using up/down and side-to-side strokes, continuing for two minutes. Fill cup, rinse mouth, and spit.	<b>Arrange Environment:</b> Have toothbrush and toothpaste, and cup on counter. Brush after breakfast and again as part of bedtime routine (e.g., before preferred activities).
<b>Present Expectations:</b> Turn all electronics off before request is made. Offer a choice of two different toothpastes. Remind of steps. Use a brush with a light that goes off after 2 minutes.	<b>Encourage Success</b> Brush your own teeth, talking through the steps as your child follows along. Post pictures of all areas to be brushed on the bathroom mirror and point to sections of the mouth to remind your child where to brush.
<b>Reward Progress:</b> Praise your child while he is brushing. Schedule favorite activities (e.g., games, reading stories, special toys) following tooth brushing.	<b>Correct Errors:</b> Stop praise and redirect to brushing when your child hesitates for longer than 5 seconds. If your child resists, or refuses, reset the timer. Ignore whining. Do not allow your child to leave or play until done.

#### Clearing Table

<b>Define Task:</b> Remove all items from the place mat when done eating. Scrape food into trash. Place plate, utensils, and glass in sink.	<b>Arrange Environment:</b> Encourage your child to keep all items on his or her mat. Have the trash can open and space available in sink.
<b>Present Expectations:</b> Remind your child not to leave the dinner table or start other activities until table is cleared. Allow your child to clear the items in any order.	<b>Encourage Success:</b> Show and explain your child how to clear table, hold plate and cup level, and make sure all food is removed when scraping. Have your child keep returning to the table until the place mat is empty.
<b>Reward Progress:</b> Praise each step of the task (removing each item, holding steady, scraping food, checking table). Offer help with scraping if child is trying, but having difficulty. Offer small dessert after place is cleared.	<b>Correct Errors:</b> Stop your child if he or she misses a step or tries to leave without the place mat cleared. Withhold dessert until the place is cleared or if your child yells or slams any of the items.

These tips and examples demonstrate how to build expectations and demands into daily routines and promote your child's successful completion of undesirable tasks. In addition to these tips, it is important to ensure that expectations are developmentally appropriate for your child. If tasks are too hard, uncomfortable, or really unpleasant you may want to rethink whether requiring the task is reasonable. Taking each of the aspects into considerations and using this planning guide will promote success for you and your child.

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