

10 Ways to Teach Your Children to Make Wise Decisions

- 1. Let Them Make Mistakes** As parents, our natural instinct is to shield our kids from all potential pitfalls. But carefully letting your kids learn a hard lesson from their own mistakes and then talking to them about it after the fact will give them great insight.
- 2. Expose Them to the “Real World”** Our shielding instinct is to hide the cold, ugly world from the eyes of our children. Yet, there is no better teacher than a helpful dose of reality. For instance, maybe you caught your child smoking. Instead of grounding him for two weeks and giving him a verbal lashing, download pictures from the Internet of the lungs of those who smoke. This is far more powerful in their mind than sitting in their room mad at you because they can’t go out on Friday night. You still might ground them of course, but WITH the real life example of why you must do so.
- 3. Teach Your Child to Know Herself** One of the greatest keys to wisdom is honestly being able to look at yourself in the mirror and know who is looking back – what their gifts are. Children who can distinguish their own strengths and weaknesses are apt to make better decisions based on their abilities. American Idol provides a good example of this during its auditions phase. Constantly we witness young people on this show who truly believe they are great singers when the reality is so clear they are not. Children should be encouraged to try many wonderful things, but be able to realize they will not excel in them all.
- 4. Learn Your Child’s Interests** Maybe they are into football. Maybe music, art, cooking etc. Whatever it may be, find out or HELP your child find out his interests. Then provide real life examples of others that share their same likes and who are successful. This teaches that hard work and dedication is the key to success and those traits lend very well to decision making.
- 5. Talk to Your Child** Open communication is vital to parenting, but is quite often hard to achieve. The second a child senses lecture, you’ve lost his ear. It is said you should not be your child’s friend, but that is not entirely true. You ARE the parent, and they ARE the child, but unless you are their friend also, you are never going to get anything real out of them. If you can find common areas where you bond and illicit real discussion from your child, you will gain invaluable insight into how his mind operates...how he thinks. This, in turn, gives you the ability to know what decision he is going to make before he even makes it. If it’s not going to be the correct one, then you can intervene and guide in the proper direction.
- 6. Get Involved** Whether it is church youth groups, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or any variety of social organizations, having your child get involved will teach her life skills that will grow her pool of wisdom. It also exposes her to positive peer pressure (yes there is such a thing!), and increases the likelihood that the decisions she makes will be the correct ones. If a child has a lot to lose by acting foolish, she is much less likely to do so.
- 7. Money, Money, Money** We can agree some of the hardest lessons learned in life are due to the misuse of cold, hard cash. We all need it, all want it, and some of us actually save it. Those who do keep it, somewhere along the line, had a real fine example of how they don’t wish to live. One of the greatest gifts you can give your child is to teach them how to handle money properly. In years past, money has been plentiful to so many of us that it became more and more difficult to show your child an appreciation for what he has. One benefit of this economically troubled time is that you can visually show your children the value of your hard-earned cash. If you can teach your child to handle money in a responsible manner, most likely that will follow through into the other parts of his life. An ancient proverb says, “Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?”
- 8. Pile on the PRAISE** Too often, parents tend to focus on the things our children might need work on. We want to fix their struggles. Yet, we might forget to praise when they get it right, as they so often do. Example: “Dad, did you see me hit that 20 footer from the corner?” “Yes, but your two turnovers in the first half really cost the team.” Sound familiar? By praising our children when they do great things, it helps reinforce the desire to make decisions to have similar outcomes.
- 9. The Friends We Keep** If we are only as strong as our weakest link, then teaching your children how to choose friendships is a vitally important task. As important as we like to think we are to our kids, their world revolves around their own social interactions and circles of friends. It is THEM they are listening to, and not us in many circumstances. One sure-fire way to know what direction your child is headed in is to get to know his friends. “Show me your friends, and I’ll show you your future.” A person should expose themselves to many different types of personalities and cultures, and should be open-minded to different thoughts, but the people they keep close to should reflect great values. Teach your child to understand the value of a good friend, and also how to BE a good friend. And this will be a great asset in helping your kids make wise decisions.
- 10. Lead by Example** If you yourself do not follow these principles, then how do you expect your child to want to? “Do as I say, not as I do” is NOT a good conversation starter with a child. If need be, use your own faults as an example of how not to be and promise to do better. Humbling yourself in front of your child and admitting your weakness will actually make him feel closer to you. And where you do have strengths in decision-making skills, teach those to him. The best lessons in life are caught, not taught, by a child’s parents.