

Stay Strong While Raising Strong Willed Children

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Brad longingly watched the older boys riding their bikes across the patches of ice on the street. He had already begged and pleaded with his Mom to let him join the older boys. Much to his dismay, she had said “No” each time he asked. But what could it hurt? Brad jumped on his bike anyway. As soon as he hit the first patch of ice, he went sailing over the handle bars. He cried out in pain while one of the boys went to get his mom.

On one hand, strong willed children can be wonderfully determined; however, sometimes this same determination is to their detriment. Strong willed children often have the ability to argue their case with zeal and show such persistency that sometimes parents simply give in. They frequently learn through experience and are reluctant to take someone else’s word for it. Testing the limits and the resolve of the limit provider is a common occurrence. Strong willed children can be amazingly creative, innovative, and steadfast while at the same time frustrating and exhausting to parents.

The following are some tools that parents may use to teach, train and motivate their strong willed child:

Accept and Work With Your Child’s Temperament – Temperament is how a person processes information about the world and responds to it. It includes persistency, intensity, regularity, distractibility, energy level, sensitivity, adaptability, reactivity and mood. Research has shown that temperament is largely preset and remains relatively stable throughout one’s lifetime.

Build a Positive Relationship With Your Child – As parents, we are entrusted with the responsibility of establishing the relationship with our children, no matter how trying their behavior may be. We need to be respectful and purposeful in building strong relationships. It is through positive relationships with our children that we can most encourage and motivate them.

Communicate Clearly, Respectfully and Directly – Strong willed children learn best to accept limits if our actions follow our words. Therefore, it is important to mean what we say, say what we mean and to clearly, respectfully, and directly state expectations and boundaries upfront. For example, to have siblings carry messages from parents invites problems because the communication is neither clear, direct, nor respectful.

Put an End to Power Struggles – By nature, strong willed children test often and sometimes test vehemently. In reaction, parents can sometimes become too heavy handed and a power struggle ensues. Whenever possible, it is helpful if parents decide ahead of time what areas are negotiable and what areas are not.

For example, parental insistence on the use of car seats, seat belts, helmets and other safety devices is appropriate. In other situations, parents may choose to give guidelines or a limited amount of choices. When it comes to dressing, for example, parents may insist on modesty but not necessarily on clothes that match.

The Lord creates and uniquely blesses each of His children and for some, He gives a strong will. For parents of strong willed children, the Lord has chosen you specifically for this very important job. He knows the challenge he set forth before you and He is with you in this process.