



Parenting the Strong-Willed Child

What Does Spirited or Strong-Willed Mean?

- Children typically have a strong sense of independence
- **Positives:**
 - Assertive, confident, determined, persistent
- **Negatives:**
 - Stubborn, argumentative, defiant, impatient, tantrums
- Want to nurture positive qualities while minimizing the impact of negative qualities on the child and on others

Steps for Strong-Willed Children

1. **Attending:** tuning in to the child's behavior and letting them know you are interested in the positive things they do
 - Sit and focus on child for 5-10min
 - Describe exactly what the child is doing
 - Have positive emotion and enthusiasm
 - Imitate what the child is doing
 - Communicates approval and teaches children how to play with others
2. **Rewarding:** make sure your child knows you approve of what he is doing, and build upon attending
 - **Social Rewards:**
 - Verbal: Encouraging child's desirable behavior
 - Physical: Providing physical contact (ex, pat on shoulder) following child's desirable behavior
 - Activities: Doing activities selected by child following desirable behavior
 - **Non-social Rewards:**
 - Giving toys or treats following child's desirable behavior
 - Should always be combined with verbal encouragement
 - **Verbal Rewards:**
3. **Ignoring:** withholding attention from a child; does NOT pertain if dangerous or disruptive behavior is occurring
 - No physical contact
 - No verbal contact
 - No eye contact



4. Give Direction

- Get child's attention and make eye contact before giving a direction
- Use a firm, but not loud or 'mean', voice
- Give a direction that is specific and simple
- Use a physical gesture when appropriate (ex. point to where toys go)
- Use "do" directions rather than "don't" directions
- Reward compliance
- Think before you give a direction and make sure you are willing to gain compliance regardless of the amount of time, energy or effort required

5. Consequences: Let The Child Experience the Natural Consequences of His/Her Behavior

- You must be willing to use a consequence for noncompliance
- Child needs to understand there will be a negative or natural consequence if they don't comply and a positive consequence for compliance
- Need to be consistent with consequences for non-compliance
 - *Ex. I cannot allow you to hurt your friends. You will need to stop playing and sit by me for awhile until you can control yourself.*
- Problem solve with children if they are old enough and verbal enough. Let them be part of the solution.