



Gregory Ramey, PhD, child psychologist at Dayton Children's and *Dayton Daily News* columnist

Giving Up and Giving In

“I know how to get my way with my mom,” proclaimed a confident preteen in my office the other day. “I wait until she comes home from work and starts cooking dinner. If I keep pestering her over and over, she gets upset and just lets me do what I want.”

Parents know that the family rules should be clear, reasonable and consistently implemented. However, sometimes it’s hard to be consistent when you are physically or emotionally exhausted. You just get tired of the whining, complaining, and arguing. When you give in to your child, two people “win.” Your child gets what he wants, and you get relief from the endless badgering.

That relief comes at a high cost. You have inadvertently taught your child that arguing pays off. It will be much more difficult to be consistent at the next conflict since your child has learned that talking back is effective.

It’s unrealistic to expect parents to always be consistent. However, here are some strategies that help manage a persistent and argumentative child.

***If you are going to give in, do it right away.** There are times when you know you simply cannot handle the endless arguing. Don’t wait until your child has been going at you for 30 minutes and then relent, as that only teaches him persistence. Instead, give in right away. This doesn’t make you a bad person or an incompetent parent. We all have such days.

***Decide not to decide.** When confronted with a tough situation, tell your child that you will give her an answer later on. This gives you a little time to think about the issue, without pressure from your child. Get ready for the inevitable “but I have to know right now.” Your answer is simple. “If you

need to know now, the answer is no. If you give me some time think about this and stop arguing back, the answer may be different.”

***Punish arguing.** If you have the emotional stamina, this is perhaps the best approach. Rather than simply restating the rule and listen to your child whine and complain, some parents fight back by punishing their child’s inappropriate arguing. “You cannot stay up late tonight. If you continue to whine, you’ll have to go to bed early for the next two nights.” Of course, only say it if you really mean it.

***Change your mind.** A friend gave in to her daughter about attending a party, and later recognized it as a bad decision. She went back to her daughter, and had this conversation. “Honey, when you kept asking me about going to the party Friday night, I said “yes” just because I was tired of arguing with you. I was wrong. I’m not comfortable with the supervision, and you cannot go out on Friday night.”

This is gutsy. I liked the fact that the mom confronted the issue directly, and admitted she made a mistake.

***Get some help.** Parent support groups can be very helpful, particularly for parents of young children. I know of one group of parents who formed a small “911 Club.” If a parent needs an hour or so of immediate relief, she can call another parent who will care for her child without any questions.

***Take control of your life.** Parents who have the most difficulty with consistency seem to live hectic and overscheduled lives. It’s hard to be a good parent when you frequently feel overwhelmed, underappreciated, and rushing from one task to another. Slow down, learn to say no, and appreciate the fine art of doing nothing.

***Have confidence in yourself.** Parental uncertainty also leads to giving in to an argumentative child. Take your time in making a decision, getting help from your spouse and others. Once you have made a decision, have enough confidence in yourself as a person and as a parent to put up with some resistance. Your job is to do the right thing, not to be a friend to your child.

*** Ignore your child.** Kids argue back because parents listen and respond. Try not responding. It works!

This parenting stuff is hard at times, and we won’t always live up to our high expectations. Most of the time, our kids turn out just fine, either because of or in spite of the way we raise them!

Gregory Ramey, PhD, is a child psychologist and vice president for outpatient services at The Children’s Medical Center of Dayton. For more columns by Dr. Ramey, visit the Dayton Children’s website at www.childrendayton.org and sign up for *FamilyWise*, a free e-newsletter for parents.