

# Ten Tips

## for Parenting THE STRONG- WILLED CHILD

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As disciples of Jesus Christ, we strive to follow the Savior's perfect example of patience, kindness, and long-suffering (see Mosiah 4:6). As parents, however, our patience is often tested, especially if we parent a child who is spirited, stubborn, or engaged in frequent power struggles with us. We might even become discouraged and ask ourselves, "What am I doing wrong?"

As you seek to build loving and lasting relationships with your children and make your



*Feeling frustrated with that child who tests your patience? Here are some ways to make things better for both you and your child.*

home "a house of order" and "a house of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:119), consider these 10 guidelines to minimize the daily "strong-willed" battles.



### 1. Set rules together.

If your child constantly fights the rules you create, consider creating rules collaboratively, allowing children to give their input on what the rules should be and why such rules should exist. If they understand the “why” of a rule, children are more likely to be compliant.

### 2. Talk to them about their experiences.

Strong-willed children are often experiential learners. Talk to them about their missteps and ask what they’ve learned. If they say, “I don’t know,” be prepared to offer up possible lessons and let them choose. Then ask, “What do you think you will do differently next time?”

### 3. Recognize their successes.

As with most children, strong-willed children need the confidence that comes from seeing they have mastered something. Regularly acknowledge their accomplishments and successes with specific praise. Vaguely telling them they are “great” is usually not enough.

#### 4. Provide them with choices.

Providing strong-willed children with options can help them feel that they are in control of their own decisions. For example:

- “Do you want to mow the lawn or pull weeds?”
- “As a consequence, you can choose between extra chores or loss of phone privileges.”

#### 5. Listen before providing solutions.

Strong-willed children respond best when they believe they’re being heard. If your child approaches you with a problem, resist the urge to merely give them a solution. Instead, listen to what they have to say and arrive at a solution together.

You can show you’re listening by:

- Asking questions for clarification.
- Restating their words to ensure you understood correctly.
- Eliminating distractions (stopping what you were doing and putting away devices).

#### 6. See issues from their point of view.

Make a concerted effort to see things as they would. Ask questions about why they think or believe what they do. Listen closely. This builds empathy and understanding.

#### 7. Be flexible and open to input.

Avoid giving ultimatums and closed-minded reasoning such as “That’s just the way it is.” Be open to discussion and willing to incorporate their input when appropriate. Most importantly, don’t be ashamed to admit when you are wrong and to acknowledge openly when their idea is better.



### 8. Focus on discipline and natural consequences and avoid punishment.

When behavior needs to be corrected, focus on discipline rather than punishment. Punishment is designed to create pain and remorse and can increase the tension between the parent and the child. Instead of punishing, focus on the natural consequences of the child's choices. Strong-willed children need to learn that their behavior has consequences and that they can learn to better control those consequences.



### 9. Offer large doses of respect and empathy.

Rules without relationships lead to rebellion. Make time to have fun together and enjoy each other's company. Work to establish a relationship of love and trust with your child. Whether they are dealing with a failure or negative consequences, a warm relationship will help them know that they can turn to you for help and support.

### 10. Love, love, and love some more.

The Savior's invitation to love one another as He loves us (see John 13:34) is some of the most effective parenting advice ever given. As we love our children like He does—kindly, patiently, completely—hearts in our home will soften, beginning with our own, allowing Him to shape us into the parents He wants us to be. ■