



*Adapted for Thrive from Dr. Meg Meeker*

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## *4 Practical Action Tips for Parents of Strong-Willed Children*

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### **1. Agitation and Anger: Keep It under Control!**

There's nothing easy about being measured and calm when children make us agitated, angry, and upset. We've all felt it.

But we parents must show our children that we are disciplined and in control regarding how we speak and act towards our kids.

We show our kids we are in control by taking charge of them, so that they begin to know what living a controlled life feels like.

As they mature, we can gradually transfer our control over to their own responsibility for self-control.

As they assume more control over time, they'll begin to feel more self-confident, and that's when you'll know you've done a great job as their parent!

### **2. Behavior: Don't Take It Personally!**

Never take your child's behavior—or misbehavior— personally!

Many parents worry that it feels as if they have to discipline their children all the time. They feel like they're somehow missing out on good relationship with them by doing so.

This is not true.

Your child's behavior has nothing to do with how she feels about you. She's just in a very tough stage of life. As a kid, she isn't thinking about you, nor should she be!

If you continue to be firm and affectionate, I promise you'll build a strong relationship with her over time.

You might feel like she hates you right now, but she doesn't. She's just trying to figure out who's the boss. By establishing your authority, she'll feel safe and loved even if she doesn't know and express it!

### **3. Calm and Control: You've Got to Have It!**

The biggest challenge for parents of a strong-willed child is the sense that you are not in control.

A strong-willed child will fight every step of the way as he tests you and pushes boundaries. It's like a battle you're both trying to win.

As the parent, you have to win, and you do this by first practicing taking control over yourself. The calmer and more controlled you are, the quicker he'll obey.

### **4. Discipline: Know When It's Appropriate and Be Consistent!**

When it comes to strong-willed kids, it's important to know the difference between a willful act of defiance and age-appropriate misbehavior.

Let's say you have a seven-year-old son. One day he decides to take his toy trucks out into the street in front of your house to race them. You know it's dangerous for him to play in the street, but he just thinks it's fun.

He's not doing this out of defiance; he's simply acting his age.

However, if you told him, "Don't play in the street," and he did it anyway, that's a willful act of defiance, and that calls for serious consequences, something like not allowing him to play at a friend's house after school if that's what he really loves to do.

Every time he defies you and tries to play in the street, make sure he knows he can't go to that friend's house that day. Remember, discipline for every willful act of defiance, not for childish behavior.

Disciplining strong-willed teens is exhausting. They begin to look and sound like adults, but don't be fooled. From a cognitive standpoint, they're still children, so you must still tell them what they can and cannot do.

Set clear boundaries and limits for them, and make certain they understand what those are. And you must also be very clear about the consequences that will follow if they cross the lines.

When your teen breaks the rules, you must discipline him and then stand your ground. Teens can be master manipulators. They've learned over the years to know how to pull your strings, but don't cave to this. Be consistent.

**“Your children were designed for accomplishment,  
engineered for success, and endowed with the  
seeds of greatness—all of them.”**

## TOP 3

# Questions Parents Ask

## WHEN RAISING STRONG-WILLED KIDS

### 1. How do I get my child to do what I say?

The most effective way to get control of your strong-willed child is to have a solid discipline strategy. The one I followed is the same one I tell my patients to follow. It is simple and includes three key steps:

1. Decide what you're going to discipline for and what you're not going to discipline for.

Be selective with your discipline. Don't fall into the trap of saying 'no' all day long. This is exhausting for you and becomes monotonous and ineffective for your child. Discipline for willful acts of defiance (a rule you've clearly set for your child that he breaks), not age-appropriate behavior (behavior that is normal, childish behavior, not something that intentionally breaks a rule).

2. Come up with consequences that really work.

For any willful act of defiance, come up with a serious, age- and action-appropriate consequence that works. This should be something that makes your child uncomfortable to the point she wants to avoid it. I'm not talking about physical pain, but choose something that you know she won't want to happen or lose. If she's a toddler, she has time-outs or loses toys. If she's in middle school, take away time with friends or a cell phone for a week (yup), and if she's a teen, she either can't practice with her sports team, drive her car or use her cell phone for a week. Sound harsh? It's not. It says you mean business.

3. Be consistent.

Establish the consequence and stick with it. A strong-willed child will break a rule you've set just to test you. He or she may break it five, 10 or 20 times. No matter how much they test you, remain firm in your discipline strategy. Do not waiver. Show them who's boss. Deep down, this will give them a sense of assurance.

### 2. How long will it take for my child to begin to listen to me?

Unfortunately, there is no magic time frame for how long it will take for your child to begin submitting to your authority and stop rebelling. It could take several years before they eventually start listening to you and following your rules. I can say this: if you follow a sound discipline strategy and be consistent with it, your child will eventually come around—even if it's when he's 25—guaranteed.

### 3. What am I doing wrong?

If you have a sound discipline strategy in place that you're remaining consistent with, you're not doing anything wrong. Your child is just taking a while to come around to your authority.

If you feel like the problem is with you, reassess your strategy. Are you disciplining for the right things? Are your consequences effective? Do you need to change them? Are you giving up too easily? Is your child confused because you are strict one week and lenient the next? You may need to make some changes to your strategy before you'll start seeing changes in your kid.