



Parent-In-Training

Time Limits

Picture this... You are typing a very important email to your boss. You have been working on it for 20 minutes, trying to get the language perfect. Enter your husband. He says that you need to stop immediately and cook dinner. You look up at him in disbelief. A myriad of emotions overtakes you. You are annoyed, angry, and frustrated. How dare he interrupt this really important project? Doesn't he understand the effort, concentration, and thought you have exerted? You can't just stop now. He is being unfairly demanding and unreasonable.

Now consider your 8-year-old son. He has been working on his Star Wars Lego set for 35 minutes and is only halfway done. You need to leave for the grocery store. You come into his playroom and say, "Okay, we need to stop now, we have to leave." He then proceeds to have a meltdown, screaming and proclaiming that life isn't fair.

Do you see any similarities in these two situations? In both of them, someone is demanding that you immediately stop what you are doing. Now granted, you may think that a work email is more important than a Star Wars Lego set, but in your child's world it isn't. Nevertheless, we often do this to our kids. In some ways, we expect more out of them than we expect out of ourselves. We expect them to transition without difficulty. This is simply unfair.

So, how do we do it differently? Start by giving your kids choices about how much longer than can do something. Use phrases such as, "Do you want to stay at the playground 10 or 15 more minutes? Should we leave for the grocery store in 5 or 10 minutes?" The trick, of course, is to have the larger number be your departure time. You then give kids a countdown. When there are 10 minutes, 5 minutes, and 2 minutes left you warn them. Make sure you are in close proximity and get eye contact when giving the time warnings. For younger kids, who have little concept of time, you can put a sticker on the clock and say, "When the long hand reaches the nine, we are going to leave." These techniques slow the transition down, give your child more healthy control, and decrease frustration levels. They also, hopefully, will help you maintain your sanity.

