

The Strong Willed Child: A Huge Challenge for Parents and Teachers

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Most parents who have more than one child will have at least one child who is strong-willed. Strong-willed children are often very intelligent children; however, they are a big challenge to their parents, other family members as well as classroom teachers. They seem to be born this way; their behaviors seem to be innate. Strong-willed children do not choose to be strong-willed. In the following description, the strong-willed child will be referred to as “he.”

The strong-willed child exhibits the following reoccurring patterns of behavior:

- He almost never accepts words like *impossible* or phrases like *what you want to do cannot be done*. He generally wants to conquer the world and thinks that anything and everything should be on his and time table. He can move with lightning speed from a warm and loving child to a very cold and immovable person. His emotions, all in just a few seconds, can turn into a Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde moment. Not knowing the child well could be a disadvantage to a classroom teacher. The teacher might think the child has a split personality disorder. However, this is not the case. The child just has a very strong-willed personality.
- He often argues the point into the ground. Talking back to them is like talking to a brick. Some of these children seem to enjoy arguing and adults finally give up saying, “You should become a lawyer some day and make money by this!”
- When bored, he would rather create a crisis, rather than have a relatively happy day. In other words, strong-willed children like to stir the pot of dissent. When there is no trouble in the house or classroom, they will come up with a tactic to get everyone upset.
- He considers rules to be more like guidelines to go by. They either want to break them, bend them, and most certainly negotiate them.

- He finds very creative and resourceful ways of going around the rules or procedures that children with other temperaments would avoid doing. When going around the rules, they are either loud upfront doing this or sometimes can go underground and be sneaky in the process of attempting to gain control. Control is the ultimate goal!
- He can turn what seems to be the smallest issue into a grand crusade of a hysterical and highly-charged controversy display of rage. Once again, the ultimate goal is control, even over the tiniest issues. He can almost drive everyone around him crazy.
- He rebels against doing the right action. Just because it is etiquette to do something correctly or it is the right and moral thing to do, he rejects these beliefs by his rebellious backtalk and forced conversations with those in control.
- He refuses to obey unconditionally. He is the master of negotiation. He has to be right all of the time and he wants to set his own rules.
- He often takes foolish risks without knowing what the outcomes will be. Risky behavior is the fire behind his complex personality, temperament, disposition – resulting often in putting himself and others in highly dangerous situation.
- He will take the simplest request and turn it in on himself. He will see the request as an ultimatum. What he sees as an ‘ultimatum’ often invokes anger in him.
- He can be the big spoiler in the family. When everything is going smoothly and happily for the family, he can come up with some remarks or an argument to spoil the entire day for the entire family.
- Often, he will not apologize because he knows that is ‘right’ about everything. He thinks other people just do not understand what is ‘right.’

- He often has the faulty perception that winning any argument is more important than getting his way. He plays the devil's advocate on just about any issue that comes up. He still wants to negotiate on everything!
- He is impulsive in many ways and often does not think of natural or logical consequences before committing a misbehavior.
- He often misbehaves because he chooses to misbehave. He wants his own way regardless of who is hurt in the process. His needs are more important than other people's needs.
- He is often skeptical of people and what people think about him. He is often critical of other people. He is often cynical and highly analytical. His being analytical and argumentative wears adult caregivers and his siblings down.
- He often does not trust people. Even after knowing a person for a long time, he still thinks he has no real friends that are trustworthy or loyal. As a result, he sees other people as just buddies and playmates for a temporary period of time. During these supposed 'friendships', he never fully trusts his buddies. They can turn on him at any time.

Are There exceptions to the rule?

After reading through the preceding characteristics of the strong-willed child, any person knows that there are exceptions to the rule. All strong-willed children do not exhibit all of these characteristics and behaviors; however many exhibit most of them. Most family units give birth to at least one strong-willed child. Strong-willed children can be both perplexing and a challenge to raise. This type of child can also hold the teacher hostage, so to speak. This child can put a halt to learning when eruptions in the classroom arise from the child.

Ten tips for dealing with the strong-willed child

1) Control is the *main goal* of the strong-willed child. Recognize that any typical young child is trying to conquer his own world. However, the strong-willed child demands to be in charge of his world and everyone else's world around him. This child needs to know that he cannot always control his own world. Parents and teachers need to explain that the world does not center on him; everyone is an equal member of the world. The strong-willed child needs to be told that he has got to understand the needs of others.

2) It is important to understand that the strong willed child is typically resistant to behavioral intervention. He won't be convinced of anything in just a few minutes. Parents and teachers need to brace themselves for conflict with the child. It takes a very patient person to work with this type of child.

3) Be willing to explain something the child needs to know. How can children learn without explanations? Explanations do not always have to be lengthy. Explain a command only one time to the child. If the child does not follow the command, give an immediate consequence and follow through with this consequence.

4) Be consistent. Be clear with your expectation/s. Stay firm and stick to the rule/s. Refuse to negotiate with the child. You are the adult; the child is still a child. Adults have many accumulated life experiences; the child does not. Do not try to convince the child of anything. The point is to be persistent and in charge.

5) Praise and encourage the child when he follows a command without arguing back. After being consistent with this strategy, it is hope that inappropriate behaviors gradually will

diminish in time. This process is not an easy process to follow through but hopefully a return of appropriate behaviors will be evident by more productive behaviors.

6) Never ever give in! If you do, little by little, the child will chip away at you until you cave into his demands in multiple situations. Giving in even just one time can result in a damaging whirlwind of more situations where the adult gives in. Giving in conditions the child to repeat old behaviors of constantly persuading the adult that what he wants to do is the right thing to do. Thus, he becomes the negotiator again and tries to take over control.

7) Do not scream. Do not yell. It never works! Screaming at the child just reinforces that the child can irritate you and be in control.

8) Keep affirming to the child he is behaving properly when the child listens and obeys your commands. This child needs frequent praise and encouragement.

9) When the child becomes older as an adolescent and argues to disrupt your authority, decide when you are going to cover your ears. There can be no war when there is no one to fight! Remember, the strong-willed child enjoys the war. When he irritates other people to the point of anger, he feels like a winner. In reality, he is not a winner at all! Ultimately, the child misbehaving makes him unhappy. Children do want structure in their lives. The strong-willed child is mistaken about his goals in life and how to get along with other people.

10) Let the child know that he may think he doesn't love you (the parent); however, you will continue to demand respect from the child. Tell the child, "You may not love me; that is o.k. I don't always love myself every day of my life; however, you are going to follow the rules."

Conclusion

Strong willed children are hard to raise and teach. It takes a patient, long-suffering and persistent parent and teacher to deal with them day in and day out. Regardless of the uphill challenge, strong-willed children have much potential to achieve and become social beings. In life, we don't all have choices in everything we do. We have to learn to stick to our ideals and also follow authority figures. We have to learn how to deal with conflict resolution effectively. We have to learn how to get along with others and play on a team.

Ironically, many children who grow up strong-willed will end up having their own strong-willed children someday. As the saying goes, "What goes around comes around!" They ultimately experience with their children what their parents experienced with them. It is a fact that many strong-willed children become very caring and achieving adults. This is why parents and teachers must continue molding strong-willed children. They must be taught! They must be controlled to some manner. Strong-willed children have to finally realize that they will never always get their own way. In order to be successful in life, they have to learn to compromise with other people.

Therefore, it is vital that parents and teachers be patient. The long-term effect of meeting the strong-willed child straight on and with consistency will eventually pay off with positive outcomes. Many a strong-willed child has become a self-regulating human being and a leader in society.