

Raising Your Demanding Child

Over 20 pairs of eyes are glued to the mother, who is sitting having a coffee when her ten-year-old child arrives and screams, "ORDER ME MY MEAL NOW!"

This child has refused to order his own hamburger (as he has done many times before) and when she calmly tells him he can either order it himself, or go home without his burger, he goes completely berserk. Yes, she has entered into a stand-off with her formidable opponent. The mother gets embarrassed as public onlookers wait in complete stunned silence to see who will win—the big one or the little one?

So what might be ways of handling the volatile, demanding, or spirited child? This is the child that is always demanding more, always testing the limits, and always provoking the parent to 'give in' and do it the child's way. It can be very wearing and demanding and result in the parent just 'giving up' as a consequence of the exhaustion she experiences.

The positive attributes of children like this is that they have a fire in their belly, a spark in their eye and a feisty attitude that assures their future in walking to the beat of their own drum instead of blindly following the crowd—a trait many parents hope for during the teen years. Yet parenting these children leaves mothers and fathers on the on the verge of saying "We quit! – we will do anything for a quiet life". And who could blame them at times.

There are some commonsense parenting tools that can help parents in these situations and can help them navigate the emotional mine field successfully:

1. Use consistency. Follow through on EVERYTHING you say. Demanding or, to use a more positive term, 'spirited' children are gifted at manipulating "chances" and finding loopholes to obtain exactly what they want. Hold your ground as calmly and firmly as possible—whatever you do, don't back down.
2. Talk less and act more. This is the most important ground rule. This works well, because when you get into a debate with a demanding child you are certain to lose! In the example above the mother responded perfectly and gave two simple options; to order the hamburger or go home without it (the talking less part); and then silently waited (the action part).
3. Develop patience. Waiting out a fight without saying anything (especially if a temper tantrum erupts in public) can be one of the most difficult, yet important, things you ever do as a parent. Demanding children are bright—they know that the biggest weapon in their arsenal is to push your embarrassment button. Swallow your pride—do not cave in just because you think you look bad in public. Remember if you cave in, your child will learn to use this trump card every time they want their way in a public setting.
4. Teach your child how to behave at times when he or she is not angry or defensive. One of the big mistakes that parents make is trying to teach their children at times when they are angry or reactive. Children are great learners so it is very important that

during good times parents address problem issues and teach their children clear ground-rules and reward them for being able to recite them!

5. Take time out for yourself. Parenting children is exhausting (especially a feisty child). Find little ways to take time out yourself (share child care with a friend, hire a babysitter more, build positive hours at extra-curricular activities) so you will have more energy and patience to draw from during the trying situations.

What does the future hold for your demanding child? Commonsense parenting does not mean letting your child get away with murder! A commonsense approach uses firm boundaries, mutual respect and discipline—teaching a child to naturally learn and grow from their mistakes rather than fight you every step of the way.

In the midst of your next fight, you may wonder if there will be an end to the madness but there can be progress in solving your current dramas. This same child who can give award-winning temper tantrum performances in public can become a responsible, respectful and enjoyable son or daughter. In fact the traits of defiance can often develop into traits of confidence and resilience.

When ‘taming’ your ‘spirited’ child remember to keep the faith, learn commonsense parenting tips and know that eventually if you follow the basic principles above "this too shall pass."