



SIX STEPS TO LOVING ADVICE

Step One: Do You Know Your Child's Learning Style?

There is a basic similarity between the learning that occurs during advice giving and a child's "learning style" in school. It is ultimately the responsibility of adults to grasp a child's unique way of processing information. Learning specialists, particularly since the nineties, have influenced schools and parents throughout the world. Their message is simple: Instead of fitting all kids into wholesale teaching models, we must fit some of what we are doing to match kids' specific learning needs.

The *learning temperament* perspective, recently introduced by educational experts like Dr. Rebecca Mannis, takes the learning style approach one step further and I believe deeper. We need to meld the latest work on temperament with the concept of learning style. Understanding how a child best learns and that temperament doesn't change much with age increases the chance your opinion will actually get through and be felt as love, rather than a boring reprimand or lecture.

Let's say you have a temperamentally tenacious child. Once she puts her mind to something, she cannot let go. This is a fact of her personality you've been dealing with forever. For advice to get through, you will need to offer a couple of options (both of which are acceptable to you), rather than go head to head. This highly effective and well-researched "limited-choice" approach is a method proposed by Dr. Stan Greenspan, author of *The Zero to Three Foundation*, and can be used with kids even in the toddler years.

For example, “Do you want to get dressed by yourself *or* with me, so we won’t be late and hurt Grandma’s feelings?” “You can share that toy with your brother without a fight and then instead of me needing to watch you guys, I’ll have more time to read to you before bed, *or* you can play by yourself; either is ok with me.” And later in life: “I don’t think you should smoke at the concert tonight; I believe it’s not right and not good for you. If we even sense you’ve smoked, there will be no concerts for awhile. But, since we can’t be there to supervise, it’s up to you.”

By granting your tenacious child some degree of autonomy, your words will have a better chance of getting through, rather than creating a toe-to-toe battle.

On the other hand, your child may be a temperamentally active type, one who learns best on the move. For such a son or daughter, as odd as this may sound, advice will need to be offered in the midst of another activity, like dancing, doing the laundry, or driving to school. Our own highly active daughter, Leah, learned best while she was practicing her gymnastics moves on our coffee table. Kids like Leah are much more psychologically receptive to advice when they’re not made to stop moving around physically.