

7) What do I do when my child challenges me?

It is the nature of children to question and challenge, but it is our role as adults to teach children the relationship between rights and responsibilities. If your child challenges you with knowledge of their rights in a way that is inappropriate, be heartened this is a normal part of learning the difference between rights, needs, and wants.

A child may *want* a sweet snack and say that they have the *right* to food. This is an example of a child being confused with their wants and rights. This is an opportunity to talk about how being a parent means that you have the responsibility to look out for their well-being, and spoiling a dinner appetite would not serve in upholding their rights.

How can I support the rights of my child at home?

As with most things, the learning of rights, respect, and responsibility begins at home. Children learn what they see and hear.

By becoming involved in your child's learning and showing an interest in who he/she is and what he/she is doing, you help your child learn the importance of giving and sharing with others.

Here are some tips:

- Set boundaries, routines, and rules. Children need to know what is expected of them. Having clear expectations also makes it easier to reward the child for good behaviour and let them learn what behaviours aren't respectful.
- Give your child choices rather than commands. For example, *'Would you like to brush your teeth before you get your pajamas on or after?'* This empowers children and avoids a power struggle.
- If your child interrupts you, you can balance their right to be heard with their responsibility to let others be heard by saying *'I know you have something important to say. I want to listen. Please wait until I'm finished so I can give you all of my attention.'*
- Ignore unwanted behaviours and reward wanted behaviours. Children sometimes misbehave to get attention. Ignore misbehaviours unless someone is getting hurt. Give your child attention for good behaviours and you encourage your child to repeat them. When you need to respond to misbehaviour use a time-out or take away a privilege.
- Criticize the behaviour, not the child. Explain what you don't like about the behaviour and why you don't like it. Avoid criticizing the child. For example, *'When you leave your coat on the floor it gets dirty and I am afraid someone will trip on it and fall'*, rather than saying *'you are such a messy kid.'*
- Have family meetings. Explain the issues and let everyone discuss the problems together to reach mutually satisfactory solutions to conflicts.