



You're not the boss of me!

Handling Defiant Children

When your son or daughter seems determined to disobey, talk back or fight with others, he or she may simply be asserting independence.

It's important to remember that children typically test boundaries of authority at ages 2, 4, 6 and 8. You can help them through these stages by remaining consistent with your expectations.

Give age-appropriate choices as often as possible to avoid power struggles. For example, "Would you like to wear the red shirt or the blue shirt today?"

Prepare in advance how you'll respond when defiant behavior does occur.

Instead of blowing up or giving in:

▶ **Count to ten** so you don't yell. The calmer you remain, the easier it will be to model appropriate responses for your child.

▶ **Give age-appropriate consequences** without condemning your child. Your child isn't bad; the behavior is. Let him know the difference.

▶ **Explain to your child** that even as you discipline, you still love him or her.

▶ **Analyze what may have triggered** the negative behavior - Anger, frustration, parental separation or some other stressful situation? If you suspect that it's something more, try to address the issue by initiating an honest and open conversation, or by offering to arrange for family counseling.

It's sometimes helpful to get feedback from others who aren't so close to your situation. Attend a parenting workshop, meet with a school counselor, or call the toll-free parent tip line, 800-CHILDREN (800-244-5373), to gain skills that can help you help your child.

Seeking help from experts is smart, because kids don't come with instructions.

