

Creating a sense of control

We all feel better when we feel that we have a say in our own lives, and that our actions make a difference.

You can help your child to feel in control of their life by:

1. Offering choices

Wherever you can, offer your child a choice of two outfits, two breakfasts, two activities.... Make sure that you're happy with both options (for example, don't offer pancakes if you've only got six minutes for breakfast, or painting if you can't face the mess today!), so that things still feel within your control. For older children, pick your battles, and give yourself and your child some grace. Does it matter if your child doesn't get dressed until after lunch, or sleeps in late? If there are things we really need our children to do, offering the choice of whether to do it now or later can be helpful too.

2. Using visuals

We can use visuals to show our child what is happening now and next, to give them an overview of our plan for the day, and to offer choices between two options. We can also use visual warnings to show that an activity is coming to an end. We use these because they offer the child a strong sense of routine, predictability and consistency. We all feel less anxious when we know what to expect, and in turn, we feel more in control.

3. Give responsibilities

Your child may like to be in charge of something at home, appropriate to their age and developmental stage. Being at home so much, this is a great time to teach our children some life skills, whether it's putting laundry in the basket, washing up, or preparing lunch. For this to be successful, we may well have to lower our standards, and accept that the tasks may be done less thoroughly than we would do them ourselves, or six times as slowly!

4. Linking cause and effect

Give feedback which clearly links together your child's action with the outcome. It can take a bit of practice, especially if we're in the habit of saying more general things like "Good boy" and "Well done." Try using descriptive language, so that someone who wasn't there would be able to picture what has happened e.g. "You played with your little sister for a few minutes, and I saw how happy she was!" or "Thank you for offering me a drink when you were making one for yourself- that was so thoughtful." If your child is doing learning or hobbies, point out the link between practice and the improvements they are making.