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# EXPLAINING TWO CHOICE DISCIPLINE

“We need to teach the next generation of children from day one that they are responsible for their lives. Mankind’s greatest gift, also its greatest curse, is that we have free choice.”

*Elisabeth Kübler-Ross*

**C**ommitment to changing behaviors is essential for successful implementation of TCD. The task requires that adults exercise personal discipline to modify or replace behavioral habits. Children will copy adult behavior—so that is where the process of implementation begins.

To help adults understand the purpose and structure of TCD, begin by offering a definition.

## Two Choice Discipline (TCD) is:

- A **behavioral management system** that includes routines and procedures for engaging in activities that require cooperation, collaboration, and respectful communication.
- A **communication system** that includes language structures, or speaking routines, for communicating respectfully—to clarify expectations proactively and offer choices for responsible decision-making.

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- [Using TCD to Change Behaviors](#)
- [Determining When and Where to Use TCD](#)



TCD helps adults establish safe boundaries for modeling and teaching respectful communication and decision-making to children of all ages.

TCD may be used to:

- Create safe boundaries for communicating expectations clearly,
- Identify acceptable and available choice options for participation,
- Teach persons to consider choices and make a responsible decision,
- Teach persons how to accept consequences related to choices, and
- Develop personal self-regulation.

A primary reason for implementing TCD is to establish attentive listening and respectful communication, the foundational skills that support positive outcomes for decision-making and behavioral compliance. Neither outcome will be achieved if there is no opportunity for respectful dialogue that clarifies expectations, choices, and consequences.

TCD is not a token economy system that includes external rewards for behavioral compliance. The intended outcome for using TCD is developing internal self-control.

- There is no competition or extrinsic reward such as points and prizes for compliance.
- There is no bargaining, bribing, or compromising.
- External influences on behavior are recognized, but they are not acceptable excuses for acting disobediently, communicating disrespectfully, or not accepting responsibility for actions.

TCD helps adults and children:

- Communicate and collaborate respectfully,
- Make decisions using preestablished choices,
- Accept consequences related to their choices, and
- Self-regulate, or manage their own behavior within preset boundaries.

Using TCD to Change Behaviors

Successfully changing the way adults and children communicate often involves unlearning old habits and learning new behaviors. You will need to model or act in ways that demonstrate respect for others and for the property of others. Your behaviors should align with expectations for performance.

The language structures or speaking routines used for TCD often require that adults change their communication habits. They have to present choices proactively and enforce consequences in ways that create opportunities for developing responsible decision-making and personal accountability or accepting consequences related to choices.

Using the TCD speaking routines and language structures consistently is critical for successful implementation. The routines and procedures will help you communicate and respond consistently. Attempting to use TCD routines without practicing how to speak affirmatively and present choices or consequences will likely yield unsatisfactory results.

Whether you are reading this information for personal use or for professional development, instruction and multiple practice opportunities will be needed before implementing any changes. The change process begins when you:

1. Observe behavioral interactions, environmental factors influencing outcomes, and communications to identify problematic behaviors that need to be changed or replaced,
2. Select target behaviors that need changing or replacing,
3. Create choices and consequences related to target behaviors,
4. Practice using TCD speaking routines to communicate choice options clearly and follow through with consequences, and
5. Practice offering two choices or administering consequences related to decisions in everyday situations without engaging emotionally in ways that will escalate problematic behavior.

Identify Target Behaviors, Two Choices, and a Consequence		
Target Behavior	Two Choices	Consequence
Uses unacceptable word choices.	You may use kind words or you may choose for me not to listen.	Adult disengages and ends conversation until later.

Engaging in collaborative discussion and completing the small-group activity “Identify Target Behaviors, Two Choices, and a Consequence” is strongly advised.

**PRACTICE ACTIVITY** IDENTIFYING TARGET BEHAVIORS, CHOICES, AND CONSEQUENCES

Determining age-appropriate expectations for performance and identifying choices and consequences for problematic behaviors is not easy. As you begin to plan, you need to prioritize behaviors. The goal is to observe and identify less important behaviors that can be overlooked in order to be strategic and focus your efforts toward changing or replacing more problematic responses.

When observing adults and children, keep in mind that many behavioral patterns or habits have been influenced by observing others. Many adults have not had access to formal training in behavior management or child development, and therefore may not be aware of age-appropriate performance expectations.

You may need to seek or share information about developmentally appropriate expectations and socially acceptable boundaries. Engaging in collaborative discussions about appropriate preferences or demands for performance may provide clarity when defining behaviors that reflect respectful communication and responsible decision-making. Using speaking routines promotes clear, respectful ways to communicate.

TCD speaking routines help adults clarify expectations and provide safe boundaries for responding. Children gain a better understanding about their role of listening to choice options and responding within a reasonable time. This helps children realize there is power in decision-making and positive benefits from self-regulation.

Before changing anything, observe current behaviors and situations in your environment. List behaviors that annoy or incite others. Make notes and describe factors that may be influencing responses. Then prioritize the behaviors in terms of importance. Identify behaviors that are annoying or confrontational and that negatively affect communication and cooperation.

When prioritizing behaviors, keep in mind that lesser challenging behaviors will naturally fade as you consistently provide structure in the form of clearly communicated expectations and choice options for performance within safe boundaries. Use the chart on page 28 of this guide, Identify Target Behaviors, Two Choices, and a Consequence, to select target behaviors, choices, and consequences. Prioritize the list of target behaviors by identifying 1–3 behaviors that need to be addressed initially.

If you are a professional development provider, and time allows, you may need to lead a discussion and identify:

- Acceptable boundaries for communication to guide decision-making,
- Age-appropriate performance expectations,
- Attention-seeking behaviors that often fade when the response is NOT reinforced,
- Behavioral responses involving safety issues, and
- Reasonable response times for decision-making and applying consequences.

**Determining When and Where to Use TCD**

Two Choice Discipline routines may be used in any environment to clearly communicate expectations for performance or to indicate that there is no choice except to cooperate. Depending on the environment, timing, or specific situations that are emotionally charged, you may not apply the consequence immediately.

You need to plan, prepare, and practice before using TCD. These suggestions will help:

- Before implementation, clearly explain expectations, choices, and consequences. Role-play to demonstrate how and when TCD will be used. Explain how and when a consequence may be applied.
- Before offering choices to children, practice using speaking routines with a partner to ensure that your tone is matter-of-fact and nonemotional. Your role is to communicate choice options and encourage decision-making. Your role is not to persuade, bargain or compromise, or pose a threat in any way.
- Observe people in public places and consider how you could use TCD routines to offer choices in everyday activities. In your mind, role-play how you would deliver two choice options and respond when a child refuses to cooperate.
- When you are ready to use TCD routines consistently, begin to allow simple decision-making such as selecting clothing, choosing foods for meals, or identifying preferences for play activities.
- Be strategic and pick battles you will win. Allow choice-making when you know the child will choose one of the two choice options that you suggest. Avoid confrontations when children refuse to cooperate. More information about disengaging from potentially combative situations may be found on page 32.



TCD speaking routines may be used by caregivers or other adults—such as educators or coaches—who work with children.



For optimal effect, adults should practice using TCD speaking routines to offer choices before attempting implementation.

Use the TCD language structures and speaking routines consistently when offering choices. Depending on the circumstances or environment, you may need to change the wording slightly, or vary the time by which a child is expected to make a decision.

- If you are asking a child to choose between two clothing outfits, you might say,

You have two choices. You may choose this outfit (point to outfit) or choose that outfit (point to another outfit). Make a good choice by \_\_\_\_ (identify a time for the child to make a decision, e.g., bedtime, morning).

- If you are asking a child to choose between two play activities, you might say,

You have two choices. You may choose to play \_\_\_\_ (name an activity) or you may choose to play \_\_\_\_ (name another activity). Make a good choice now, please.

- If you are asking a child to choose to comply because there is no other choice, you might say,

You choose to obey and buckle your seatbelt or you choose a consequence. Make a good choice now, please.

- If you are telling a child that he or she made a choice by choosing NOT to cooperate and therefore chose to earn a consequence, you might say,

You chose not to obey or \_\_\_\_ (or name the desired behavior, e.g., wear a seatbelt). You chose a consequence.

You must select age-appropriate choices and consequences related to decisions. You do not have to name or describe the consequence immediately, nor do you have to apply the consequence at that moment. Depending on the circumstances and the environment, you may need to apply the consequence at a later time when the circumstances are less emotionally charged or when it is more convenient for following through consistently.

Preferably, consequences are applied as soon as possible after the child chooses to not cooperate. However, there are times when you are not in an environment where you can follow through. Also, there are times when waiting to apply the consequence will be more effective for reducing an undesirable response. Delaying a consequence until the cost for disobedience is more memorable helps to reduce undesirable responses from reoccurring.

There is a caveat for using TCD. You must respond consistently and follow through with choices and consequences. Regardless of how well a child behaves, you must remain in control and follow through by applying the consequence. Even when a child begins to cooperate after challenging authority and performs perfectly for the remainder of the day, you must apply the consequence for the disobedience. Consistency is key to your success! If you allow the child to make a choice and the child chooses disobedience and earns a consequence, allow him or her to live with the choice and develop accountability.



Consistency and follow-through are keys to success when implementing TCD.